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VALENCIA'S GARDEN

MRS · SCHUYLER CROWNINSHIELD

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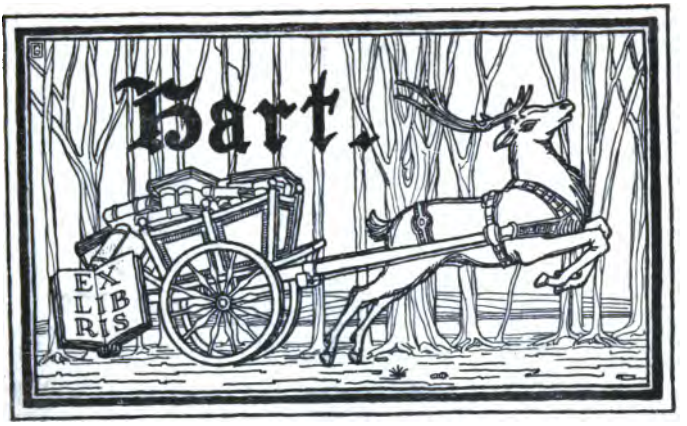

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VALENCIA'S GARDEN

VALENCIA'S GARDEN

BY

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To A. S. C.

VALENCIA'S GARDEN

I

"MY young friend, the Honorable William Hamptdon, will breakfast with us this morning, Phigie. Please see that the déjeuner is in all respects befitting his position and ours—and ours." Count Aristodème's voice took on a pompous tone. Countess Edmond sighed and looked utterly helpless.

Valencia dropped her cup. The coffee was spilled upon the fresh table-cloth.

"Oh, now! now! now!" exclaimed Count Aristodème, fussily. "And we must have another cloth for the second breakfast."

"And why, I ask you," protested Valencia, the admonished, "cannot we French have the cups with handles for our early coffee? The bowls are large and slippery, they fall from the hand without warning."

"They were good enough for my mother, the Countess d'Alêne, they should be good enough for my wife."

Valencia shuddered slightly, arose, got a cup from the décharge, and poured out for herself another cup of coffee.

Count Aristodème had uttered a part of his sentence

in English, four words. They were "The Honorable William Hamptdon." It is true that he had pronounced it somewhat differently from the way in which that young scion of nobility would himself pronounce it. Count Aristodème had said "Ze 'onorab' Veeliam 'Amp'done," with that utter disregard of the terminations which distinguishes his countrymen, and that ignoring of the aspirate which would do credit to the most pronounced cockney of them all. This mortification of England being something natural and unavoidable in France (for the letter "H" is scarce in the country of Gaul), it is not astonishing that Count Aristodème ignored the sound of it.

"Wilt thou appear?" Valencia turned to the Countess Edmond.

"Certainement, and why not? Why should I forego my déjeuner because we have an unexpected guest?"

Valencia cast a hurried glance downward at her faded brown linen.

"Ah! Thou art ever thinking that thou hast nothing to wear, Valencie. Thou lookest well enough," said Count Aristodème. "A young thing like thee does not need the chiffons."

"I need them more than Phigie." These words had come to Valencia's lips, but did not break the barrier. She was too proud to utter them. Instead, she said to her sister-in-law, "What wilt thou wear, Iphigénie?"

"Oh! I know not," returned the placid Countess Edmond. "Perhaps a foulard, perhaps a mousseline de soie, perhaps a——"

Valencia shot an angry look at her husband. Count Aristodème was little, and fat, and wrinkled, and old.

He had got beyond the place where a young girl's angry glances could affect him, even if he saw them, which he did not. A child like that need not worry about her gown. Ze 'onorab' Veeliam 'Amp'done would not look at a chit of a girl in her teens, it was hardly necessary for him to know who she was—or—stay! After all, the wife of the head of the house could not well be ignored, he must remember his own importance. Why had he not considered this before? Valencia's appearance, whatever it was, for good or bad, must reflect upon him.

He glanced scrutinizingly at the Countess Edmond.

"Hast thou anything the child could wear?" he said, and then added, reluctantly, "Combien ta couturière prend-elle pour une robe?"

Valencia turned her head and looked at the Countess Edmond's roly-poly figure. The glance had something in it of contempt, softened with a thick ingredient of kindness, for who could dream of being angry with Phigie, who never harmed an ant?

"Valonthia may have anything that I possess," murmured the Countess lazily, and helped herself to five lumps of sugar.

"My heart! the sugar; that makes the fat," remarked Count Edmond, timidly.

His wife added two extra lumps to the syrupy mixture, stirred her coffee, and sipped it contentedly. "Who is this 'onorab' Veeliam 'Amp'done?" she asked, turning large, brown, Greek eyes on Count Aristodème. "Viens ici, Mimi! Viens ici, pauvre chat!" She turned to the cat as if the answer to her question was of no consequence.

"He is the son of an English milor whom I once knew, ma sœur."

"You knew? That is news!" Valencia's lightning glance expressed these words, but her lips were tightly sealed.

"He comes to see the château. He is by way of being an architect, a younger son of Milor Barrin'tone. They are not rich. He must do something for himself, the young man. These English spend pounds where we spend francs—I had almost said centimes. He has an order to restore an old house in England, of the time of Marie la Reine d'Ecossais. He comes to look at our château, added to in the time of her husband, François Second. He sent me a letter with his card. A letter from my old friend, his uncle. Ah, many a jolly time we have had in the Quarter; his father, Milor Barrin'tone—dead now, alas, these three months past—myself and—and your father, Valencie." The Count Aristodème chuckled and shook at the recollection of those far-away pleasures of youth, then gave a regretful sigh that they were no more.

"At what time does this Sir 'Amp'done arrive, frère aîné?"

"He comes to déjeuner. Nous déjeunons à midi aujourd'hui. Pourquoi, ma sœur? Does it not please thee?"

"Certainement, frère aîné. Am I ever displeased? Café, Alceste. Where is Alceste?" She looked about helplessly.

Count Aristodème arose and filled his sister-in-law's bowl. She took seven pieces of sugar and awaited his answer.

"Alceste has gone down to the village to invite ze 'onorab' Veeliam 'Amp'done to breakfast. It gives me pleasure to wait on thee, ma sœur."

Valencia, unable to bear more of these platitudes, swallowed her coffee and arose hastily. Her lashes were wet. She jerked angrily toward the long window, which opened, door-like, upon the veranda.

"Valencie!"—Count Aristodème raised his fat voice a trifle. She halted half way through the opening, but did not turn round. She felt if she did that she should burst into a passion of weeping. What was it to them? It was everything to her. She waited.

"Valencie, I shall be glad if thou wilt step up to Madame Malafré and ask her to have the goodness to join us at breakfast. Tell her that I will meet her in thy garden, petite."

"Bien! Aristodème," said the girl, and dashed out to the veranda and down the steps. She had caught up her garden hat, swinging it in her hand as a concession to the eyes that she thought might be watching her from the breakfast-room.

Countess Edmond shrugged her plump shoulders ever so slightly at the bustle of Valencia's departure, but she did not complain. Countess Edmond went through the world shrugging her shoulders lazily. It was her only protest at the noise of the universe. She could not understand why les autres could not go about as velvet-shod as herself, but it was too much trouble to mention the fact. She felt vaguely that she could not reform the world, why should she make her life miserable by beginning the task?

Count Aristodème sighed and said, "She will always be a child."

Count Edmond smacked his lips over his coffee, looked adoringly at the sweet face of his wife, and said nothing.

Valencia ran down the path of the slight incline until she came to a level spot. Here a steep flight of steps rose suddenly toward a hedge of straggling thorn, which stretched and tangled twenty feet above her head. Up these steps she went swiftly on firm young legs. Arrived at the top, she pushed open a small gate and was at once the only inhabitant of a bower of joy, a land of riotous summer bloom, that most charming, rarest of delights, an old-fashioned garden. Roses of every shade and color nodded and blushed and bowed, and gave of their perfume to that robber, the morning air, and of their pollen to his rival, the bee. The scent of the mignonette, the honeysuckle, the carnation, and a thousand other summer flowers, enveloped her. They mixed together and intermingled; claiming, in an occasional whiff, recognition, each one, as against his neighbor. Valencia stretched out her young arms as if she would embrace every one of them. "Mes fleurs," she called aloud, joyously. "Mes fleurs. You are the only things that belong to me alone, to me alone! You are mine, all mine!"

Valencia bent her head and smelled of one flower, and then of another. She plucked a deep red bud and placed it in the front of her dress. Then she stood at the little gate, looking down upon the valley. Over the tops of the low trees could be seen, in the distance, the village of d'Arcy-Renaud. She supposed it was there that the Honorable William Hamptdon was staying, probably at the Three Princes. She could see the

spire of the cathedral, and she knew that the Hôtel Trois Princes lay just underneath it, within its shadow. She thought that it must be very warm down there, in the valley. It was not cool, even up here, and as she spoke her thoughts aloud, a wandering breeze came and stirred the little brown curl near her temple, which the sun had invested with a fleck of bronze.

But there was no time for looking and wondering about the Honorable William Hamptdon. Valencia must continue upon her upward and onward way to the Maison Malafré. They saw her from the breakfast-room as she left the little garden and wound round behind the stone wall.

"Elle prend le short cut," said Count Aristodème, who was fond of interlarding his sentences with English. The coming of ze 'onorab' Veeliam 'Amp'done had brought retrospection down upon him. It had taken him back to the days of his youth when, with his young English friends, he had painted, and laughed and flanéed about the Latin Quarter.

Valencia wound up the hill, disdaining the carriage road which ran past both châteaux and which was so much easier for the pedestrian; but that would take her a quarter hour longer, and she must get home to see, to try to find—— "Ah! Is Madame Malafré at home?"

Valencia knew as well as the butler that Madame Malafré was chez elle. She had seen her only the night before, when she and Count Aristodème had sat in amorous, decorous friendship, just within the portals of the salon at Salvaresse. Unless she had gone away in the night, and there were no trains from d'Arcy-

Renaud in the night and only two in the day, she must be here, and up there behind the persiennes of that very room in the gray, stuccoed wall."

"I have a message for Madame Malafré. Will you say to her——"

"Oui, Madame la Comtesse." Guillaume's bow was nauseating in its servility.

"Will you tell her——"

"Oui, Madame la Comtesse." A deeper obeisance.

"That the Count d'Alêne——"

"Oh! oui, Madame la Comtesse——" A lower cringe. Guillaume had been accustomed to service with the nobility. His soul revolted at the word trade.

"Come up, come up. Montez! Montez!" came in shrill tones over the balustrade. "I shall never get the message, else."

Valencia pushed past the obsequious butler, who blushed at the thought that he lived with only the widow of a jeweller, and mounted the stairs with swift, lithe steps. At the top stood a small woman in a voluminous wrapper, which would be white again when it had paid a visit to the blanchisseuse. She held out to Valencia a thin, wrinkled hand which sparkled with rings, whose stones were really so good that their unacquaintance with water for a somewhat long period had done little to dim their beauty. Madame Malafré's face was yellow and wrinkled now, but what matter? This was only a young girl.

When she had taken the hand of Valencia in her own, she led the way to her bedroom. Arrived here, "asseyez-vous," she said. There was never any danger that Madame would tutoyer Valencia. She indicated

a low chair by the window. She got again into bed and covered herself with the bedclothes.

Valencia shuddered as she passed by the dressing-table. Upon the extra cushion which stood at one side were detached and single curls looking extremely like dead mice. They lay where Thalie had pinned them, flat as to their round ends, after wetting them with a weak solution of soap and water. The wires of the curls on the cushion stood perpendicular like thin little tails, and Valencia jumped involuntarily, thankful in a moment of weakness that she had worn tight sleeves. The two horns which stood up on Madame's high bony forehead were there to do service in just such an hour as this. Being taken unaware was not one of Madame Malafré's usual annoyances, but she was ready always for the worst..

When she was again in bed and closely covered, she said:

"What a color you have to-day, child! Is it very warm out?"

"No," said Valencia, "it is only because of the climb."

The girl was nearly suffocated in the close air of the sleeping-chamber. "Shall I not open the window, Madame?" said she. "It is a lovely morning."

The lady looked ruefully at her visitor. "Well, well," she said, hesitatingly, "if you will draw the curtains round me. There! place that screen at the side, so! Now, what is it?" By this time Valencia had opened the window, and had leaned so far out, drinking in the morning air, that she did not catch what Madame Malafré was saying. When she had obtained a large

enough supply of oxygen to last for a few seconds, she turned her head toward the bed and heard, for the first time, the question which Madame Malafré was repeating over and over.

"What is the matter, Valencia, have you not the ears?"

"I have the ears, and the nose as well," returned Valencia, in English.

"Oh, certainement! If you will speak that English——" Madame Malafré began to take down her hair. She had nearly unrolled one curl-paper when Valencia said:

"Aristodème wishes to know if you will have the goodness to breakfast with us this morning?" Madame quickly began to roll the paper upward again, wetting her fingers in her mouth to aid in the result.

"Is it anyone's fête day?" she asked, as she rolled.

"No, there is a stranger coming."

"Ah! And who is this stranger—a lady?" Madame's ever ready jealousy spoke in the question.

"No, the son of an old friend of Aristodème. And now, Madame, I must return. There will be the flowers to cut, and arrange, and I must dress."

"What shall you wear, child?"

Ah, what?

"I—I have not yet decided," said Valencia, darting an angry glance at the bed-curtains. Madame Malafré need only choose, Iphigénie need only choose, whereas Valencia had no choice. How lovely it would be to say to old Radegonde, "Get out my green organdie, or no, the rose, or, after all, I think I will wear the lace dress from Paris, or no——"

"Tell my kind friend that I will come with much pleasure, Valencie, and now, child, ring the bell for Thalie, I must rise. At what time is déjeuner?"

"At twelve o'clock, Madame. Bon jour, Madame." Valencia was out of the door, taking long, deep breaths, and half way down the stairs, when she turned and came back again. "Oh! I quite forgot, Madame," she said, "Aristodème told me to say that he would meet you in my garden."

"My thoughtful friend! Ah! Valencie, he was my friend long and long before you ever knew him."

"And why not?" interpolated Valencia, scornfully.

"Have you rung? Ah, Thalie. Get me my blue-striped silk, or no—" And Valencia, afraid to hear the enumeration of the articles of a wardrobe which gave to the owner a choice of clothes, ran down the stairs and out of the house and down the hill, and only stopped running when she came within the terraced precincts of her own domain.

The flowers had been cut, the table arranged to Valencia's satisfaction, and she paused at the door to see if anything were missing. The Honorable William Hamptdon had been served with the finest of everything. The softest and largest serviette had been laid by his plate. The roll whose crust showed the clearest, most golden brown was placed upon it. The two old spoons of the date of Honoré d'Alêne, with the heart and the boar upon the crest, were polished until they shone like the lustre above her head, and laid by the side of the napkin. The thin old glasses were softly rubbed with one of the most worn and thinnest of towels, and then again with a finer cloth. The daintiest

bud of all that she had cut in the garden was laid across the napkin. The others must each have one for the sake of symmetry, but they were selected with little care, and then Valencia slowly turned away and went upstairs to her room over the salle à manger. Here she began to dress, or rather to take preliminary steps to that end. First of all she took the red bud from the front of her waist and placed it in water. Then she removed her dress and let down her hair. It enveloped her like a brown veil. When the sun crept into the room it kissed a wave now and then, turning it to bronze.

Valencia drew a low chair before the ancient armoire à glace, and sat there looking at her reflection. She turned her head this way and that. She opened her lips and looked at her teeth. Ah! how uneven they were. White if you like, but her upper lip so short it would not always cover them, never when she smiled. It was hopeless when she smiled. Thank God, that was not very often. One did not smile very often at Salvaresse. She leaned closer and tried to catch the cast in her eye, that cast in her eye which had a fascination for most of those who knew her best, which she hated, hated, hated! She stamped her foot. She heard the lustre shake and jingle in the salle à manger below. Her mind was in a turmoil.

She twisted her hair carelessly back from the low brow and knotted it on the top of her head. She would smooth down those rebellious, horrid little curls later. Aristodème hated to see them. It was untidy. He had bought her some quince-seeds to make a paste, that her hair might be plain and decorous, but somehow she

had never had time to make the paste, and now, if she ever needed it, it was to-day of all days, when a guest was coming.

She arose and opened the door of the armoire into whose mirrored back she had been peering. The armoire was not crowded with finery. The first thing that caught her eye was the black silk which she wore on Sundays when she went to the little Protestant church at d'Arcy-Renaud, while the rest of the family attended the cathedral near by. But she had known well enough what she should see. She had been thinking of nothing else all the morning, and her thoughts had given her anything but pleasure. It was too hot for the black silk to-day. Beside it hung the costume which she had worn last at the convent. That was a school dress. Certainly it was too childish a thing for the Countess d'Alêne to wear, and she was that by right. It was only at times like these that the title seemed to be of any value. However, of what use had it ever been to her? There was her communion dress which she had afterward used for her wedding. That was folded away upon the shelf. Of course there could be no thought of that. It was too short for her now. She had grown an inch and a half since her marriage, six months ago. There was a black-and-white checked twill jacket and skirt. "Ugly English-looking things," she murmured; and last of all there was a pink lawn, soft and clean, but faded with many washings. Her pretty cotton gown of blue and the white cambric were miles away with the blanchisseuse.

"I will run him up the bills, me!" was her angry exclamation. "I have the right to something." Her throat ached suddenly, her lashes were again wet.

She unhooked the pink cotton from its wooden peg. Two desires were at war within her breast. One was to descend charming and sweet like the Duchess over at Abbaye de Bref, and take everyone by storm and fascinate them all with her wonderful beauty and lovely clothes, and the other was to mortify her husband, that dolt Edmond, and that placid, immovable goose, Iphigénie, by appearing in, and at, her worst. The worst was the school dress. She could not come down looking like Mrs. Quentin over at Bref. She had no beauty and no fine clothes, so let her do all the discredit to the family possible.

She bathed her face and slim brown hands for her own comfort, remembering Madame Malafré's bedchamber, and then stood deeply thinking. She had no jewels. She had no rings. She kept her wedding-ring in the washstand drawer, out of sight, behind the cover of the soap-dish. Then she went over and sat on the side of the bed and lost herself in dreaming.

A tap at the door.

"Le déjeuner est servi, Madame." It was Radegonde's voice.

Valencia snatched up the pink cotton, threw the skirt over her head, hurriedly fastened her collar and cuffs, placed the red rose in her button-hole, threw her one ornament, a necklace of Roman pearls, round her neck, and descended the stairs. She hesitated to enter the salon. She had intended to make an elaborate coiffure. Aristodème might be angry. Had they sat down without her? Would Aristodème add this indignity to all the rest? No, they were still in the salon.

"Monsieur le Comte awaits Madame," said Alceste,

with reproachful voice, from out his high collar. She was an interloper. She had come to Salvaresse on false pretences. His tone always reminded her of that fact.

"I await Monsieur le Comte," said Valencia, loftily.

Ah! they were coming in now. Aristodème leading with Madame Malafré, Iphigénie with ze 'onorab' Veeliam 'Amp'done, and Count Edmond alone. Valencia waited in the hall until the two couples had passed in, then glided out of the darkness, and placed her hand within the arm of her brother-in-law. This was her right, the right to come last in her own house. They could not rob her of that.

An onlooker would have said that there seemed to be no disposition on the part of anyone to rob her of anything, but Valencia's world to-day was upside down. She waited until Madame Malafré had tripped lightly to her seat on the right of Count Aristodème, and Phigie had rustled and languidly jerked into her seat upon the left of Count Edmond, until ze 'onorab' Veeliam 'Amp'done had taken his chair on the left of her husband, and then a tall vision in soft old pink lawn slipped into her seat on Count Edmond's right, and next to the guest. She turned her head, and surveyed him earnestly, the which her husband seeing, said:

"Ah, you have not met my wife. Allow me to present you to the Countess d'Alêne."

Young Hamptdon, who had taken Countess Edmond for one of the wives and Madame Malafré for the other, looked at the tall girl by his side in wonder. Had he had more experience he would hardly have thought Madame Malafré the wife of Count Aristodème, if but for his excessive devotion to her.

The breakfast was long and formal, and to the credit, be it said, of old Aimée, excellent. The conversation was chiefly of the Count Aristodème, Lord Barrington, and their early days together. Valencia sat quiet. She said little, only calling, by a gesture or a raising of the eyebrow, Alceste's attention to Mr. Hamptdon; when he had finished his soup, that his melon was at once placed before him, that it was ripe; that the ragoût was handed twice, and that Mr. Hamptdon preferred white sauce to brown.

Once she said, turning to Hamptdon, "I am sorry that the figs are not yet ripe."

"I do not miss them," he said, "though I am fond of them."

"Yes," said Valencia, as if it were no news to her that the Honorable William Hamptdon was fond of fresh figs.

"My soul! not so much of the sugar," pleaded Count Edmond, who imagined his lovely Iphigénie taking on rolls of fat with each mouthful.

Countess Edmond sprinkled more liberally with sugar the fruit upon her plate.

"Le melon n'est pas mûr," she murmured sweetly, and pushed the point of her spoon down through the snow-white heap.

Count Aristodème ate only semola, and other cereals.

Hamptdon laughed, and turned toward Valencia. "You seem to anticipate my wishes, Countess. You know my tastes better than I do myself. Do you know many English people?" He wondered why he suddenly felt so gay and happy; he had not felt so light-hearted since his father's death.

"No, I have known only two," she replied, in such excellent English that Hamptdon started, and looked at her again. Oh! that adorable cast in her gray eye, that adorable rose at her breast, and the more lovely changeable roses of her cheek.

"A cigarette, my dear sir. Will you do me the honor?"

"If you don't mind, Count, I will smoke a cigar on the veranda." Hamptdon took two from his pocket, holding them out to Count Aristodème and Count Edmond in turn, who shook their heads.

"It is rather strong for the house, for the ladies, perhaps," added Hamptdon.

Valencia left her chair at once, and led the way to the veranda.

The Countess Edmond arose languidly, saying: "Edmond, my knitting. I will sit in the sheltered corner."

Madame Malafré also arose. "The wind is too strong for me," she said; "I will return to the salon, if you please, my friends."

Count Aristodème offered her his arm. "Rentrons au salon," he said, obediently acquiescent. Count Edmond went to look for his wife's knitting, and Valencia perched herself on the veranda rail in the windiest corner and leaned her head against a pillar. The breeze from the hill blew through the honeysuckle-vine and swept the tendrils of her hair over her eyes.

Hamptdon lit his cigar, and then stood awkwardly looking at her.

"Are they too young to be left alone?" asked Count Aristodème of Madame Malafré.

"Too young, and why, my friend? Have you not put

it forever out of her power to make it any harm?" She sighed, with a faint look of reproach at Count Aristodème. He stretched out his plump little hand and clasped her own.

"Was that my fault, petite?" he said. She sighed again, and pushed her jewelled rings over her wedding-band.

Count Aristodème arose and went to the door. He looked out upon the side veranda. He knew quite well what he should see. It was always the same. His brother Edmond had thrown a yellow silk handkerchief over his head, and was leaning back against the side of the house, already quite fast asleep. He awoke long enough to drink a cup of coffee, and then relapsed, with a snore. His wife sat quietly knitting. Alceste helped her to coffee, and waited while she disposed of two very sweet cups, then offered it to Valencia. Hamptdon drank his coffee slowly, with the appreciation of a connoisseur. He said to the young girl before whom he stood:

"I never tasted coffee before."

"Never tasted——"

"Oh! you know what I mean, of course. Long years ago at Capri and Bordighera—" Her heart gave a great leap. "That was coffee. We have none in England."

Count Aristodème looked at his brother hopelessly. He glanced at his sister-in-law still more hopelessly.

Madame Malafré had become so much a necessity to Count d'Alêne that he might be said to have acquired the Malafré habit, and here was a chance for an uninterrupted tête-à-tête. On other days Valencia would plunge into the room so suddenly, like a young colt.

To-day she seemed absorbed with the stranger. Iphigénie never moved. Edmond would sleep for two hours perhaps. Count Aristodème himself could not walk after déjeuner.

"My dear young friend," he said, laying his hand on Hamptdon's shoulder. "We have not much with which to entertain you here. Perhaps the view from the hill, the garden—I——"

Hamptdon had prepared himself to decline, fearing the chaperonage of the Count himself, "but I, unfortunately, am not able to climb, after my breakfast. I must eat the cereals, and not exert myself; but you two, you are young. My wife loves to walk; she will show you the way, if you like."

Hamptdon set down his cup with such violence that Count Aristodème trembled for his delicate Sèvres, and asked, "Is it too much trouble?"

"No," said Valencia, at whom he had looked.

She was trembling from head to foot. Was it coming right after all? Did he not care then about the old pink dress, or that she had no rings, no chains, only the strings of Roman beads in which she had hastened to array herself at the last unhappy moment?

Count Aristodème trotted into the house, and brought out Valencia's shady garden hat.

"What use, Aristodème, when you know I will not put it on?"

Hamptdon got his own straw, and together they decorously walked down the slight incline, stood a moment on the level, then Hamptdon ran up the steps, opened the gate, and waited for Valencia to join him. She came slowly upward, her slight young shoulders rising ever

higher as he watched her. When she was on a level with him, he threw away his cigar and held open the gate. When they were well inside, Valencia fastened it with the greatest appearance of precaution; then she walked rapidly along one of the garden-paths, which was parallel with the long side of the château, though separated from its walls by a hundred yards, or more, of space. When she had proceeded for two hundred feet or so, she turned a corner and came out into a little square, where there were seats, and where an old decayed apple-tree bent its branches to the ground.

Hamptdon followed the slight figure, and turned the corner to find her standing facing him, her eyes full of angry tears.

She approached him quite closely, then laid one hand upon his breast and said, in piteous accents, "Oh, Beel! Beel! Do you not know me?"

The Honorable William Hamptdon's heart came up into his throat. To have the most adorable creature that he had ever gazed upon touch him with her hand, to see tears in those gray eyes, that adorable eye with the cast, to hear her calling him by his name—for, of course, it was Bill that she was trying to say—was more than he was capable of bearing all in a moment. He got red and white by turns. His breath came quickly. He looked back along the path, then down over the top of the hedge toward the château, then up the hill, where the chimneys of Madame Malafré's house showed dimly through the trees. Then he sat down suddenly on a bench and gasped, "What—what do you—you mean? Do—do I know you? Should I know you?"

For answer Valencia sat down by him, leaned her head

against his shoulder, and burst into a hearty fit of crying. The young man started back. "Don't, don't," he said. "You—you mustn't, you know. It won't do, really, Countess, it won't do."

He wondered if this was the way that foreign countesses always did. He had heard remarkable stories, but no! this girl was a child, an innocent child, and there she sat, sobbing against the back of the bench, along which she had retreated, only two feet away from him. It was a situation to try the strongest soul, but the generations back of Hamptdon had been full of men of honor, and he felt that there must be some mistake.

"Beel, Beel!" sobbed the girl. "You must remember Bordighera. You said at déjeuner that you remembered Capri. Oh! Beel, dear Beel! You said you remembered Capri."

The Honorable William endeavored all in a moment to recall the various flirtations that had come and gone with ease. He had not been in Bordighera or at Capri for years. Not since he was a little chap, not since he had been there with his father. No, it was a mistake; she had taken him for someone else. He had not been addressed as Bill for so many years. Certainly not by anyone but his father, his sister, and Barrington, his elder brother. No girl had ever called him Bill. But stop—yes—when he was called Bill, it was by——"

"You do not remember nothing of Bordighera?"

When Valencia was excited, she sometimes used two negatives in the language that should have been her native tongue.

Had Hamptdon succumbed to his feelings but a moment since, he would have clasped this young goddess

in his arms, as she seemed to encourage it. What did it all mean?

"And Capri, you do not remember nothing of that—the cave, the boat, our boatman Lani, my father——" She advanced, looking earnestly at him. At this the Honorable William Hamptdon got up from his seat and retreated toward the hedge. His eyes were shining, his cheeks were flushed. "What was your father's name?" he asked. He trembled in every nerve.

"And his name? Beel, surely you remember. He was Il Signor Traverres, my father."

"Travers, you mean? A big, jolly chap named Travers? An American?"

"If he was a chep, my father, that I do not know, me! But he was called Mistare Traverres. He was my father, and he is dead. I am Miss Traverres." Hamptdon's tone had hurt her. She drew herself up to the extent of her slim young height and looked at him very coldly.

"Miss Travers?" he said, with hope in his voice.

"Ah, no, I forget always. I am Countess d'Alêne."

"You don't mean that you are little Lonci Travers? My little playmate Lonci!" At his words a smile overspread her features, her tears were drying.

"Ah, yes." Her chilly tone changed at once to one of friendliness. "I am little Lonci. Don't you know me now, Beel?"

"Lonci, Lonci Travers. Is it you? Is it you indeed? How are you here? Why are you here? Tell me, Lonci, tell me."

Valencia arose to run to him. He warned her back.

"No, no! it is not usual. You must stay where you are, Lonci, little Lonci."

Valencia stood looking toward him, her hands outstretched. "Oh, Beel, my dear Beel, I have no friend but you. Charlemagne—the pie, it is true, but nothing of human. Do you recall me now, Beel? The little Lonci of Bordighera? Ah, the walks, the drives, the donkey cart, your father's paintings—very bad paintings, Beel, very, very bad——" Hamptdon laughed.

"Like those of Il Signor Travers," he said.

"They were beautiful paintings, Beel! You must not say that. My father is dead, Beel, and I am married, and I have no friend but you." Dangerous words to a young man with some sentiment and the kindest heart in the world.

"I know that your father is dead, Lonci. That is partly why I am here."

"Why you are here, Beel?"

"Why I am in France. Yes, I thought that I should see you perhaps, later, but not here, not so." He glanced down at the stately château with a shudder. The probabilities and possibilities of Valencia's life flashed across his mind. He grew white. It was all so new and strange to him. Yet when he left England the little Travers girl had been but a childish memory.

"What is the matter? Are you ill, Beel? Come sit by me and tell me why you look like that?"

"Lonci, I must talk to you very seriously," said Hamptdon. "I will come and sit by you, if you will promise to sit quite at the end of the bench. You at one end and I at the other." Hamptdon looked severe as he suggested this drastic measure.

"And why should I sit at the one end, me? I cannot talk so far away from you, Beel."

"It is not usual, Lonci. You must do as I say. Then I will give you a message from your father."

"Oh! from my father? A message from my father? It was a mistake, then. He is living—my dear father is not dead?" She arose and clasped her hands over her breast, her breath came fast, her eyes were shining. "I will do all you say, Beel. Come, Beel, dear Beel, come, come! and sit down. A message from my father, you say?" Valencia drew her breath more quickly. She saw no affirmation in his look. She shook her head sadly. "No! he is not living? And did you see my father before he died, Beel?"

Hamptdon came slowly back to the place where she stood.

"Now, Lonci," he said. "Go, go and sit down there at the very end of the bench. And stay there, promise me to stay there, or I—I cannot say what I shall do."

"What might you do, Beel?"

"I might run away and never come back, Lonci. Now are you going to do as I have said?"

Valencia's cheeks flushed.

"I see you think that I have been forward, unmaidenly. I have read of such things in books. I had no such thoughts, Beel. You are a part of the old time. I knew you were coming. I longed to see you. I do not think of you except as the little Beel I used to know. There, am I far enough away now, 'onorab' Veeliam 'Amp'done?"

They laughed in chorus.

"Yes, you are far enough away, if you will stay there."

"You need not fear," said Valencia, holding up her head. "I have had no lovers, me! I do not know how

to act the part of lover. I am thinking only of my father. Come, Beel, tell me quickly, quickly, or I shall cry again."

"Lonci," said Hamptdon, slowly, "you remember when your father left you at the convent, I suppose?"

She nodded. "The last time, you mean?"

"He came to London; you know this, don't you?"

Valencia nodded again. "He was going to Caleeforniah," she said. "He told me he would stop with the Lord Barringtone."

"Well, he did come to London, and stayed with us in Park Lane. I remember it very well; it was only eighteen months ago."

"Only eighteen months. Ah, I remember it too well, me!"

"Then where did he go?"

"I have told you, to Caleeforniah. He went to see after some of his mines, and then, and then—" Valencia choked, and was silent.

"And how did you come to marry, Valencia. To marry such an——"

"To marry so old a man, you will say. That was an early plan of my father and Aristodème. My father had forgotten, or given it up long ago, but Aristodème and my uncle Lonsdale had not forgotten it. I was to stay with the sisters, and grow and grow for Aristodème. I should not have remained in the convent to grow for him had my dear father returned. We still went to Italy each time he came from his mines. I grew and grew. My father had some money, had he not, Beel? When he was dead my uncle Lonsdale comes to Aristodème and says: 'She is grown. Her father is dead. She

is rich.' It was part true. I was grown, but my skirts were still short. My dear father was dead, but I was not rich. It seems that those mines whereby people become rich had failed in something. Then my uncle Lonsdale makes over all my property to Aristodème, which later we found was not much. I was glad to marry with him, me! I was tired of the sisters. I wanted to see the world. He takes me, he brings me here, and then he finds that I have nothing, worse than the paupers at the Maison de Charité at d'Arcy-Renaud. Figure to yourself how my uncle Lonsdale must console himself that he need not provide for me more. I am a trouble to everyone. I have no clothes. I have no rings. I have only enough to buy my bread and butter, and yet I am the Countess d'Alêne. I am married with the eldest brother. I outrank Phigie, who has so much money. Think how I am placed!"

"They are good to you, are they not, Lonci?"

"Oh! but good! They do not beat me! I am no one! I am tolerated! Madame Malafré, she it is who is the angel of the household."

"And how can that be? She does not live here."

"Aristodème loved her always; before I was grown, while I was growing, when I was grown, he loved Madame Malafré. When she found that he was waiting for a child to grow, she married a rich jeweller. Les orfèvres et les bijoutiers gagnent beaucoup d'argent. Have you seen her rings? Her hands are not always clean, but her rings are something—oh, but something to make the envy. Have you seen Phigie's rings? She has thirty-two turquoises, thirty-one solitaires, another set round with little diamonds. It looks some-

times as if she had hung little blue berries all over her fingers."

"I noticed them," said Hamptdon; "they are beautiful."

"Sometimes I think as I sit and look at those rings that I would do anything to gain them. I love jewels. I adore pretty things, me! If I had money I should never think of bread and butter; I should go and buy everything of the most beautiful, and put it on me. Oh! had my dear father lived I should have had all those things. He would not have married me to Aristodème had I not wanted it—of that I am sure. He often said that the Count d'Alêne was his friend, that he belonged to an old and noble house, that he was safer than a young man. I had never seen the Count Aristodème. He had an elder brother who was the Count d'Alêne. He has been called so since his brother died. I pictured him something very grand, like a wonderful painting that I saw once in the Louvre—a gentleman on a fine horse, with a sword. I knew if I begged my father not to marry me away from him while I was yet so young, that he would not do it; and when I saw the Count d'Alêne, I knew that my father would not have married me to him, not at present in all cases. We often talked of our days to come, that we were to spend together. He was to take me to Caleeforniah, Beel—I had never been in Californiah, neither in America. My mother died here, you remember. She was Mademoiselle Rogers of America." (Valencia said "Rogère.") "My father did not know what to do with me. You know that my mother was already dead when we were at Bordighera. Dear Bordighera!" A long sigh. Hamptdon sighed

an accompaniment. "When my father, Mistare Traverres, was obliged to go to Caleeforniah, he always left me at the convent. Sometimes he would stay six months, sometimes a year, but when he returned he always took me out from there, and we went travelling to Cannes, to Cairo, to Florence, to Capri, to Bordighera. Ah! Bordighera. The last time he stayed so long that I wondered. For many months I had no letters, me! I nearly cried my heart out. One day comes my uncle Lonsdale to me and says: 'Lonci, your papa is dead. You have no money. There is a kind gentleman who is willing to marry with you—your father's friend, in fact, the Count d'Alêne. I cannot support you.' When I saw the Count d'Alêne I was disappointed. He was not like the picture in the Louvre; Aristodème! But I had no money, me! And what did anything matter? My father was dead. Something had gone wrong with my father's mines. I thought it very kind of the Count d'Alêne still to marry me, for my father's sake. That is what my uncle Lonsdale said. I did not know that Aristodème thought he was marrying a young girl with a fortune, which would renovate the old château. I suppose it is very kind of them to still have me. If they turned me away, I should have nowhere to go. Sometimes I think I shall die, Beel, when it all comes back to me. Sometimes I think that if I should throw myself off the cliff there, it would be well for all——"

"Lonci, Lonci!" Hamptdon started up. "Don't talk so; you must not. Aren't they good to you, Lonci, little Lonci?"

He could not subdue the caress in his voice. Valencia, thus encouraged, moved a pace nearer.

"You see, Beel, it is like this. I stand to them in the place of la parente pauvre—the poor relation. Aristodème is not rich. A distant relative may leave him something, but we do not count on that. They are kind, but I am nothing; I have no money. I am a burden. They do not gêné themselves. Is it not natural? I think it is as well to fall over there," she indicated the cliff with her glance, "as to live in that large old château with nothing young. O mon Dieu, with nothing at all young!"

Hamptdon had sat listening to Valencia's disclosures with deep interest. After she had finished he sat quiet, looking away down the hills, across the long valley stretching eastward. Then she fixed her eyes eagerly on him—as if he could help her if he only would. Thus they remained for some moments. Finally he broke the silence.

"Valencia," he said, "it is very strange that I was coming to find you, and, instead of your being in the convent in Paris, I stumble upon you here. I was going to the convent to take a message and a parcel for you."

"For me, Beel? I know no one in the wide world but you, and—oh, yes! I have forgotten my uncle Lonsdale, I know him. I never wish to see him more, me, but he would never send me a package."

"It is not from your uncle Lonsdale, Lonci. The message is from your father."

"A message, and from my father! You said that, but I do not understand! Tell me quickly, Beel. Give me his message. And my parcel, you do not tell me about that," said Valencia, edging toward him.

"Back! Valencia, go back! I cannot tell you unless you stay at that end. You know our compact."

Valencia, with a reddening of the cheeks, slipped back again.

"When your father was in London the last time, he said to my father, 'I do not trust those people over in Paris any too much, Barrington.'"

"That was my uncle Lonsdale," interpolated Valencia.

"'I think that I shall put what I can afford into some good salable article and leave it with you for my girl.' This my father told me."

"He always called me 'my girl,'" whispered Valencia.

"Then your father began to search the jewelry stores——"

"Jewels!" gasped Valencia, edging along a little way.

"Now, Lonci, what did you promise? I can't tell it with you so near."

She slid away a little, gazing earnestly at him.

"He searched all the jewelry stores in London," resumed Hamptdon, "and finally told my father that he had secured a valuable thing for you. That he would leave it with him, my father. That should he die when he went to——"

Valencia nodded. "Caleeforniah," she said, while two big tears rolled down her cheeks.

"He wished my father to send or give the parcel into your hands. My dear father died three months ago. My brother and I have been trying to settle the estate. It is not large. We wanted to do the right thing by my sister. She is younger than Barrington. She is a trump, Lonci, and so, until now, I have not had the

time. Then I thought of the order that I had received to restore a certain old house in England. My sister got the order for me. She had heard of this place. She told me that the château of Salvaresse was the only one she knew of that approached it in any way. She advised me to come. I took the parcel from my father's safe, where Barrington—that is my brother—found it. We read the words on the outside together. My father had said that we were to open it. We did open it, Valencia, and we found——"

"What?" said Valencia, edging along the bench.

Hamptdon held up his hand to enforce the compact between them. Valencia complied, saying, "Tell me quick then, Beel. I cannot wait. A letter, a ring, a brooch, something from my papa to me?"

"Neither a ring nor a brooch, Valencia," said Hamptdon, "but a very beautiful necklace of pearls."

"A very—beautiful—necklace of—pearls," echoed Valencia. "A very—beautiful—necklace of—pearls. More beautiful than this that I have on? Have you got it here, Beel? Beel, dear, have you brought it with you, that very beautiful necklace of pearls?"

"No, I deposited it at the bankers in d'Arcy-Renaud for safe-keeping. I should not dare to carry it about. How could I dream that I should meet you here? Besides, Lonci, it is too bulky. It is worth a large sum."

"Worth a large sum?" whispered Valencia. "My dear papa; my dear papa."

"I meant to take it to you to the convent in Paris to-morrow, Lonci. When I had breakfasted here, and had been shown over the château, I meant to take it to you in Paris, and now——"

"And now?" said Valencia, looking at him wistfully.

"And now, I don't know when I can get away. I will bring it to you to-morrow, or this afternoon, if you say so. I must consult with the Count——"

Valencia started to her feet.

"Consult with the Count! You shall not consult then with the Count. But am I to have nothing of my own, me? Am I ever to be dependent on these people? Regard my clothes. Regard my dress. Regard my hands. I that have no silks and no rings——"

"You should have a wedding-ring, I suppose," said Hamptdon, laughing, though with a sudden tightening at the heart.

"It is in my washstand drawer, behind the soap-cover. I threw it down the well—Radegonde brought it up in the bucket. I threw it down the hill—a little peasant brought it back to Aristodème. He scolded me well, principally, I think, because he must pay the child a half franc. That is all of the jewelry that I possess. It is very thin. The pearls, Beel, are they as large as these?"

Hamptdon surveyed the strings of Roman pearls critically.

"These were my wedding gift from Aristodème," said Valencia, simply. "They cost thirty francs fifty centimes, at the Louvre. Aristodème is not rich."

"They are larger than those you have on, Valencia, the pearls your father left. These you wear have five strings. Those I bring you have seven. They are worth, we were told at the jeweller's, in Bond Street, about twenty thousand pounds."

"Twenty thousand pounds!" whispered Valencia, "twenty thousand pounds. What a great deal of

money! My dear papa! Is there so much money in the world? And how much is that in francs, Beel?"

"That," said the Honorable William Hamptdon, slowly, "is exactly five hundred thousand francs."

"Beel!" exclaimed Valencia, rising, and running toward Hamptdon, her arms outstretched, not to be kept at bench-length any longer.

"They are mine! mine! mine! I thought this garden was the only thing that was all mine, but those are mine too, and if you tell Aristodème anything about them at all, you and I will be friends no more, no more, Beel, never! No more. Du tout, du tout, du tout!"

Young Hamptdon sat and thought. He tried to weigh both sides impartially, the pros and cons; Valencia's case against that of the old Count d'Alêne. The pearls were Valencia's, certainly. Had her father wished them to go to a possible husband, he would have said something of the kind in that small slip of paper, which his brother, Lord Barrington, had found inside the box. The words were, "For my little Valencia, to do with as she will." Clearly, then, the pearls were hers. No one could claim them. Hamptdon knew nothing of French law. He knew not whether the husband could demand anything of the wife's inheritance should she refuse it to him. He had heard Valencia say that there was enough to pay for her bread and butter, and certainly the Count was bound to support his young wife. His wife! Hamptdon turned sick at the thought. Valencia watched closely every change of his countenance, as a prisoner in the dock scrutinizes the face of each one of the jury.

"Well, Valencia," he said at last, "I suppose the

pearls are entirely yours to do as you choose with, and in that case you have the right to conceal their presenee from everyone in the world. I will bring them to you to-morrow. It will be too late to get them from the bankers to-day. How shall I give them to you, if you do not want the rest to know?"

"Up here in my garden," said Valencia, quickly. "You need not come to the house. You can go round by the road, and when you get near the house of Madame Malafré, you can strike away and come down here. It is quite easy. Shall I point it out to you? Come at about two o'clock. At that time Aristodème is taking his siesta, if Madame Malafré is not here. Iphigénie is knitting on the side veranda, and Edmond is fast asleep under that orange-colored handkerchief. Then I shall take them—" She ceased and bent her head. "Hark!" she said, "hark! on nous appelle."

"I hear nothing," said Hamptdon, rising.

"Valonthia, Valonthia," came now more distinctly in the voice of the Countess Edmond, "why dost thou delay?"

"How long do you remain in the country, Valencia?" said Hamptdon, turning toward the long walk.

"I wish that I could say, jusqu'à la chute des feuilles, but I fear it will be until they come again. Aristodème says that we cannot go to Paris this year. I wonder if I make the difference. I do not eat much. I call you to witness. Regard me!"

"Poor little soul," said Hamptdon, his eyes moist, his throat husky.

"Valonthia!"

"Come! We must go. Very well, then, Beel, I will

be here, in my garden, at the hour of two. Do not disappoint me. O mes perles! mes perles! How can I wait to see them?"

Hamptdon opened the gate and Valencia was down the steps and going toward the house, almost before he had latched it again. Her movements were full of life. She approached the veranda, hardly seeming to heed the fact that she had left her visitor behind.

"It is the Quentin," said her sister-in-law. "See! There they come up the driveway."

"Who is coming?" asked Hamptdon.

"Do you not see those three who are coming up the valley? There they are now, within our half of the hour-glass. They stop and look up. See! My dear Mrs. Quentin is waving her hand. Ah! and there behind comes my friend Gartha Valery. The married people are the Quentin, they have been but a short time married. The old gentleman is an archbishop. He is their dearest friend. What a thing it is, Beel, to have a dearest friend. For me, I have no friend but Gartha Valery, and I know her so little till now. See how the Archbishop leans on Mrs. Quentin. He cannot mount the path, of that I am sure. Their carriage follows behind. See! Mr. Quentin beckons to the coachman."

Hamptdon perceived that the four were standing just beneath the cliff. Then the man that was dressed in a shooting-costume turned and beckoned to the coachman, who was following. The pair of spirited horses dashed alongside, and when the gentleman had helped the older man into the open victoria, and the tall lady had taken her seat beside him, they disappeared beneath the archway, which perforated the rock on which the

château stood, and the tall gentleman whom Valencia designated as "the Mistare Kentan," came up the path, a growing girl racing along ahead of him.

The Countess Edmond had lazily arisen, laying down her beloved knitting with a sigh. She touched her husband gently with her plump foot, in its run-down slipper, "Awake, my heart. Awake! There are visitors."

"She is Duchesse," said she, explanatorily to Hamptdon, "though she does not claim her title. That is so queer about you Anglish. Ah, bonjour, Monsieur Kentan. We will go through the house and meet Madame la Duchesse at the other door."

"I will escort them, Phigie," said Valencia, whereupon the Countess Edmond reseated herself with a sigh of relief. Hamptdon, who had not been made known to the new-comer, took a wicker chair by her side. She looked at him with the kind, placid eyes of a cow, and resumed her knitting. The thirty-two turquoises and their sprinkling leaven of diamonds flashed in the sunlight. This was one of the times when Hamptdon liked Valencia better than before. Most ungrateful of him, as the Countess Edmond was doing her best, though unconsciously, to salve his wound.

When the new-comers had reached the veranda, Hamptdon was taking his leave.

"And why going?" asked Valencia, with a pout of the lip.

"I must," said Hamptdon; "I have left a friend at the hotel. He must think me a rather poor travelling companion."

"A friend, and who then is this friend?"

"His name is Cluggs," said Hamptdon.

"And why did you not bring this Mistare Cluggs?" asked Valencia. "It would have been amusing, that! Oh, mon Dieu! Cluggs! Cluggs! Mistare Cluggs."

"It isn't a very pretty name, but he is a good fellow for all that. His father is Sir Artemus Cluggs, the great brewer," said Hamptdon, trying to make a good case for his friend.

"Yes, I have heard that the Sirs of England make the beer. Do all Sirs make the beer, Bee—Mistare Hamptdon?"

"Oh, no!" said Hamptdon, laughing. He turned to Countess Edmond. "I must go now. I have not seen the château, Countess," he said, "but I find that I can remain at d'Arcy-Renaud a day or two yet. My reason for going to Paris has fallen through."

"And why not see it now?" said Count Aristodème, who had seated Mrs. Quentin by Madame Malafré, as the greatest compliment which he could bestow upon her.

"I must not stay now; my friend is alone."

"Mistare Cluggs is alone," laughed Valencia, "le pauvre Mistare Cluggs! Bring heem—to-mor—or no, not to-mor——"

"Then I shall have the pleasure of showing you over the house to-morrow, Monsieur 'Amp'done?" said Count d'Alêne.

"Thank you, Count. Will three o'clock suit you, or shall I say four?"—"That will give me another hour in the garden," he thought.

"Four o'clock will suit me perfectly, monsieur. Au revoir, à demain," and the Honorable William Hamptdon vanished down the road.

Valencia's excitement was so great that she could

hardly contain herself. She carried off Gartha to her garden, gave her all the flowers she could hold, played games with her, and in her exuberance whispered in the ear of Charlemagne, the pie, who was extremely friendly this morning: "I am to have a necklace all of pearls. It is composed of seven strings. It was left to me by my father. Oh hé! Oh hé! It is mine, all, all, mine!"

As Hamptdon started to go down the path he heard a pleading voice behind him, and, ascending into Valencia's garden the pattering steps of Count Aristodème, following those of Madame Malafré. His little feet in their square hob-nailed shoes made a scraping click on the stone of the garden stair.

"My dear Thérèse," Hamptdon heard, "I could not come to-day. I was forced to send Valencie in my place. My cereals have not arrived. And I am weak. Oh! but weak."

Hamptdon did not look round, but he heard a woman's voice quavering with emotion. "My poor friend," it said. "Mon pauvre ami. Tu me fais mal." The voice was full of tears; it showed to the unwilling listener that its owner suffered with and for Count Aristodème. "Picture to thyself that thou hast no one to see that thou hast thy cereals. Had I the opportunity, what a pleasure that would be! Thou shouldst never go without, mon ami."

Hamptdon was out of ear-shot now. Had he looked over his shoulder, he would have seen the old Count bend and kiss the hand of Madame Malafré.

"Art thou better now, dearest friend?"

"Always better when I see thee, petite," was the chivalrous answer.

CHAPTER II

IT was now to-morrow. Valencia had passed an almost wakeful night. She had laid tossing on her narrow bed, wondering if Iphigénie could hear her restless movements in the next room. Aristodème was, she was certain, sleeping his head off in the great chamber at the end of the hall. She had never penetrated there, and he, thank God! never came here. She was not what he had wanted. He had his old-time love. Valencia was to have brought him money, and although she had been a disappointment in that way, she was not blamed too much, only not loved, slighted, almost ignored.

"What would I have," communed Valencia with herself. "Is it not better to be his wife only in name? Phigie talks of having an heir. What is the use of an heir, if that heir will have no money! Oh, those bornings of children, they are not for me, thank the good God! Will the night never end? Will the day never break? What shall I do to pass the night? I that never was awake before in the dark. I might read Iphigénie's 'Lives of the Saints.' They must make those saints to chuckle in Heaven. No, I will not disturb her; she suffers enough from the snoring of her Edmond in the tower room. She often has to close her door. There is more than a door between Aristodème and me, Dieu merci!" After these characteristic musings, Valencia

dropped asleep, but was awake before the sun came shining up the valley, had opened the persiennes softly, and was leaning far out of the window drinking in the delicious air of the morning. It seemed hours to early breakfast time, weeks until déjeuner.

"Aristodème," she said, looking up at him, as he trotted off to take his siesta. "Why are some days so much longer than others?"

"It is because we miss one particular friend," said the Count, with a glance in the direction of the hill, and went away to the seclusion of the library.

At one o'clock Valencia had mounted the steps and was in her garden. She had no hat, but carried her shears and great garden-gloves, and began snipping at the rose-leaves with a will. Then she took up a little trowel, and commenced to loosen the earth round some of the roots. She varied the employment by getting on a bench and, shading her eyes with her hand, looked afar down the valley; then remembering that she had told Hamptdon to come over the hill, she jumped to the ground and cast her eyes upward. Then, seeing no one, she glanced for the twentieth time down along the valley.

Hamptdon, who had no bump of locality, was approaching the Château of Salvaresse from the lower road. He had no idea how to skirt the hill and get down to Valencia's garden by the way of the Maison Malafré. He would follow the road up which the carriage from Salvaresse had brought him yesterday. Then he was sure not to lose his way. He was, at the moment when Valencia shaded her eyes and looked down toward the valley, emerging from a curious circular place, whose out-

let into another of the same kind nearer the château was narrowed at their conjunction into a space of about ten feet in width. Here the rocks approached each other so closely that one standing in the middle of the road could almost touch them on either hand; then their lines widened into a second valley with circular sides, the two being connected by the strip of road which ran through from one to the other. The narrowest space looked like a slender waist as one gazed down upon it from above, the two valleys swelling out before and behind. The whole lay of the land reminded Hamptdon of an hour-glass.

As he emerged into the second circular enclosure, the fine old structure directly in front of him burst again upon his sight. Its foundation had been erected upon a mass of rock that towered above the low land for the height of two hundred feet or more. The château was built upon it, and rose high above and even with the perpendicular face of the rock. Beneath the château the road continued on its way by passing through a tunnel in the rocks. No one had ever been able to determine whether this tunnel was a natural one or whether the robber knights had improved on nature, thus giving themselves an opening beneath the château. After passing through the archway, the road rounded up the hill to the back entrance of Salvaresse.

Hamptdon had been driven through this dark archway on the previous morning, and expected to walk through it now, but as he gazed upward at the château, and naturally toward the garden where he had spent some blissful moments yesterday, he saw that someone was standing by the garden gate, that the someone was

Valencia, that she was alternately waving one hand and beckoning with the other, and that she was shaking her head violently and pointing toward the château, and by her motions was indicating where she wished him to strike into the little natural path at the side of the road and so mount to the plateau, and so to her garden.

Hamptdon looked upward at the fine old mediæval pile which arose defiantly from the cliff so far above the arch. He caught a glimpse of a yellow handkerchief on the side veranda, the one farthest away from where Valencia stood to make her demonstrations. In vain he searched for other signs of life, but seeing none, he came boldly toward the hill, and struck into the little footpath which led upward. Valencia, being of her sex, had gone back to the cutting of her flowers. She heard the latch of the gate click, but her hearing was not extremely acute this June afternoon.

"Beel," she cried, throwing down her shears and running toward the little gate, "have you come at last?" But it was only the snuff and blue figure of old Félix pushing his way awkwardly in with a yoke over his shoulders, a pail of water depending therefrom on either side. He stumbled along to the middle of the garden, set down his pails, took a watering-pot from its hiding-place among the bushes, and began to water the plants.

"I will do that, Félix," said Valencia.

"I was told by Monsieur le Comte to water; I must water," said Félix, pouring stolidly.

"I tell you, Félix, I will do that," said Valencia, imperiously.

"I was told by Monsieur le Comte to water, and I must water," repeated Félix.

Valencia, an angry light in her eye, planted herself squarely before the old man. "Look at me, Félix. Who am I?"

Félix continued watering, not even turning his head.

"Do you see me, Félix?"

"I see you," said Félix, turning a trifle. "You are the little thing our Count brought home from Paris. Oh! but a little thing, of no account."

"Félix! How dare you?" Valencia stamped with her foot. "This is my garden. No one comes here but at my invitation, at my bidding. Go! go away, at once!"

Félix turned the spout of the watering-pot upon the gardenias and gave them a liberal wetting.

"N'abimez pas ces soucis là—Félix. Prenez garde! I wish you to go, Félix, do you hear? I can water much better than you."

"Oh hé," remarked Félix, and turned the spout on the roots of a periwinkle. "La pervenche est une jolie petite fleur."

Valencia leaned over and took the full pail in her strong young hands. She deliberately lifted it and poured the water down over the hedge to the greensward below. "Le voilà! You will learn how to treat the Countess d'Alêne when she has had a word with your master," she said.

"When she behaves like a Countess d'Alêne, then I will," said Félix.

He emptied all the water from his pot, then seated himself upon the bench where she had sat yesterday with Hamptdon.

"Félix," she said, half crying. "Go! Go, this instant. If you do not go, I will—I—will——"

Félix arose, saying, "I will procure a pailful at a time," and went out of the gate and down the steps. She followed him to the top. There Hamptdon found her tying the gate fast with a bit of string which she knotted to a tree near by. "Now we shall see who is the stronger, Félix or me," she said, and turned to see her new old friend standing behind her. "Have you not got nothing, then?" she asked, her eyes shining with excitement.

"They are here," said he, tapping his breast. "Don't I bulge out a good deal, Lonci?" He climbed over the little gate and stood by her side.

She surveyed him critically. "Boolge? And if you boolge? You do boolge extrêmement, Beel. Come now, to the corner there, and show me my pearls."

She ran along the walk, Hamptdon following. They seated themselves. Hamptdon opened his coat and took from it a very bulky box and laid it upon his knee. First, he unfastened the cord that tied it round, then he removed the paper.

"Oh! hurry, Beel. How slow you are!"

She leaned against him in her anxiety, now and again looking up into his face to see why he was so long about it. There came a second wrapper; this was sealed. When Hamptdon had removed it, there was still the oil silk to be unwrapped, and then there lay upon his lap a splendid purple box. He fumbled at his watch-chain. "Don't, Lonci," he said, panting, "don't lean against me so." His heart seemed nearly bursting its bounds. She straightened herself, but bent from a distance to take the first look at her treasure. He took the key from his chain and unlocked the box, raised the lid, withdrew a

thin layer of cotton, then a thin slip of tissue paper, and the beautiful necklace lay revealed in all its lovely creamy lights.

Valencia gazed awe-struck. Then she clasped her hands over her dazzled eyes. "Close the lid, Beel, Beel, close the lid!" she cried. "I cannot bear it. I cannot!"

Hamptdon closed the lid, as in duty bound, laughing softly.

Then Valencia removed one hand from before her eyes, peeping through the fingers of the other. Then she reached over and gently pushed it open again. Yes, there they were. There was no mistake. By this time she had grown bolder, and lifted the necklace from the box. The pearls, depending from her hand, swung to and fro and sent out a hundred milky tints and opalescent flashes.

"Let us see how they compare with yours," said Hamptdon. She drew the Roman pearls over her head, and laid them upon her knee.

"O Beel," she said, "I shall never look at these again." She turned to her new treasure. "O my beauties! my beauties." And then she clasped the wonderful strings closer in her hand and thrust the discarded make-believes down deep within her pocket.

"There is someone calling," said Hamptdon.

"Only Félix," she replied; "let him call."

"Where is he?"

"At the gate. I have tied it. He shall not come in. Beel, will you promise me one thing?"

"Yes, certainly, Valencia, anything."

"Go to the gate. Take the pail from Félix, and throw the water over him."

"Oh!" said Hamptdon, dryly. "And how often do you suppose I should get in here after the Count heard of it?"

"That is true," said Valencia. "Very well then, let him call and scream. He swears, too, a little. We will wait until that event is past and then we will go down to the château. Now, Beel, there is one more thing that I wish to ask you. These are all mine, are they not? Mine, mine!"

"Your father said so, Lonci."

"And I can do anything with them that I like, me!"

"The paper said, 'To do with as she will.'"

"Where is that paper, Beel?"

"It is in the box, under the silk lining. I feared it would be lost."

Valencia seized upon the purple box. So great was her excitement and agitation to receive this unexpected message from her father, that the wonderful necklace dropped to the gravel of the walk and lay unheeded there. She tore back the padded silk, and there she found the little missive, written by those kind fingers that would never hold hers again. Her tears dropped fast as she opened the letter, and as she examined it, Hamptdon, with an exclamation of annoyance, stooped and picked up the pearls from the ground. Valencia did not notice this; her eyes were glued to that dear handwriting that she had thought never again to see.

"'For my little Valencia,'" she read, "'to do with as she will.' 'To do with as she will,'" she repeated. She sat gazing at the tiny scrap in the well-known characters. Her thoughts were far away, at Cairo, at Capri, at Bordighera—ah, those old dead days! She lived over her little lifetime in a few short moments.

"Well," said Hamptdon.

Valencia gave a long, long sigh.

"Beel," she said, "do you know what I must do?"

Hamptdon sat looking at her, drinking in her innocent, fresh young beauty. He did not answer.

"You may be astonished at what I shall say, you! but Beel, I must sell some of them."

"Sell them, Valencia! These wonderful things! Sell them?"

"Only a few, Beel, only a few, one from every string. Could you do that, Beel, dear Beel?"

"I—suppose—I—could," said the Honorable William, slowly.

"Could you take off one from each string?"

"It would take some time, Lonci, but I suppose I could. You could do it yourself, I think. They are strongly tied, but you could cut the thread from the clasp."

"Beel," said Valencia, earnestly, "to-night I am going to do this. When I go to my room, I shall take off the seven pearls, and to-morrow I shall give them to you. When do you go away, Beel?"

"I—I—hardly know yet——"

"Do you think it will be to-morrow?" anxiously leaning across his knee.

He drew away. "Don't!" he said. "You mustn't, I don't like it." Valencia started back, much hurt. She colored and looked down. "No one cares for me, Beel. I wonder why? Is it the cast in my eye, Beel, or is it my teeth? Look!" She drew her lips apart, "They are not so very uneven, and they are white, are they not? Perhaps because my hair is not smooth. Beel, if you

will be kind to me, just a little, and not speak so cross, I will promise to make the quince bandoline and I will do my hair——"

"Don't! Lonci, don't! I don't care a—a—well, I don't care at all how you do your hair. There is Félix calling again. We must go down."

"Beel, how can I give you the seven pearls?"

"Could I get them to-morrow in any way?"

"Oh, to-morrow! I have a thought. Aristodème is angry with me, that I did not go to the village to see about his cereals. Oh, these rice-fed gentlemen! These fat, well-fed, rice-fed messieurs. Should you poke them they would sink in, in little round holes, like mush. If the world comes to an end, he must have his cereals, Aristodème! Well, then, the plan is this: I am to drive with Alceste to get the cereals. Aristodème declares that they pay no attention to Alceste là-bas at the boutique—that they send always the wrong things. It will be to-morrow morning. I will start with Alceste. You must start also from the Trois Princes. You must go along the road and stop down there in the little valley by the waterfall, and stand behind a tree, that Alceste may not see you. When I reach the little waterfall, I will say, 'Alceste, I am tired of driving; I will walk a little.' I often do that."

"Where did you learn all this, Valencia, such easy deception! I could not do what you propose. I should never be allowed to come here again."

"Deception! Me! Do you think that I want to walk with you, Beel? It is only to give you my pearls. Then when you have the pearls——"

"There must be some other way——"

"Ecoutez!" persisted Valencia. "Then when you have my seven pearls, I wish you to spend them for me. I wish some rings, a great many—emeralds, where Iphigénie has the turquoises."

"People would see them, Valencia."

"I need not wear them; I want them, me! And some silk stuffs for gowns, and a lace dress, and many beautiful things, that when you come again you will not see a poor pauper, subsisting on the charity of the great family at the château, but the Countess d'Alêne as she should be by right."

"I understand, then, that you wish me to take the pearls when I go away——"

"Only the seven," interpolated Valencia.

"I understand you, only the seven, and sell them and get you some rings and some stuffs."

"One by one, not all at once. You must get the clothes ready-made for me and a little umbrella as well, en tous cas. I can give you my height, Beel. I am not very large around." Hamptdon glanced at the slight waist.

"I am rather tall. They must know in those magazins in Paris."

"Valencia! how can I send you the clothes!" exclaimed Hamptdon, despair in his voice. "Where shall I send them to? It will only get you into trouble."

"You can send them to my old blanchisseuse over at Chatillon. I have thought it all out in five minutes, me! Send the parcels there. I go there, là-bas, sometimes. Sometimes she comes. The rings can come in a little box by the post."

"It seems like an awful conspiracy, Valencia, all

wrong somehow, but, of course, if you say so. Come now, Lonci, why not come right out with it, to the Count, tell him about the necklace, tell him about your wish to spend some of it for clothes, tell him——"

"And see it melt away pearl by pearl? Perhaps see Madame Malafré wearing my pearls? I do not know much of the world, me! but I know—" she broke off, shaking her head and looking earnestly at him. "Beel, Beel! Do not be so cruel. My father said, 'To do with as she will.' Do you know, Beel," looking at him very earnestly, "I have not had not so much as a five-franc piece since I came to the château, me!"

Hamptdon's hand went involuntarily toward his pocket. Valencia blushed and drew back. "You misunderstand me," she said. "I wish only what is my own. Aristodème might offer me money now; I would not take it. He did not begin right, Aristodème."

"You are married to him, Lonci."

"Not so much married, after all. They said some words over us at our two churches and at the Ambassade Americaine, but that makes little or nothing. That is all there is to it. There is that godenot Félix, again. Come, come, Beel, we must go."

She arose and laid her hands on Hamptdon's shoulders. He shook them off impatiently.

"Don't! you mustn't, Lonci; really you mustn't. You annoy me. I have told you that before."

"O Beel," Valencia sighed. "M'y perfectionnerai un peu plus tard, but when you are my only friend, and you are going away the day after to-morrow——"

"Who said that I was going away the day after to-morrow?"

"You said so, Beel, you said so. That you could remain to-morrow, but no more."

They passed down the long walk, Valencia in advance, Hamptdon following. The seven strings of pearls glowed and shimmered in the sunshine; the Roman pearls knocked against each other in Valencia's pocket.

"How can you cut away the pearls without the Count seeing you?" asked Hamptdon, in an undertone. They were nearing the veranda.

"Did I not tell you it would be at night, Beel, when I am about going to my bed?"

"Would not the Count notice it?" asked Hamptdon, wondering what the answer would be.

"And if he will see me cutting the pearls! He who sleeps at the end of the great corridor, I at the other end, I with my door locked. He who never comes there, thank God! Why should he know?"

"I didn't think of that," acquiesced Hamptdon.

When they reached the level spot she said, "Wait a moment for me." She ran swiftly to the end of the house, and called, in her high mellow notes: "Aristodème, Aristodème, is it not time to awake? The Monsieur Hamptdon is here; he is come to see the château."

Hamptdon saw a movement at the persiennes, and in a few moments there was a reply. Valencia nodded. "He comes almost at once," said she.

"Are your rooms there at that end of the house?" asked Hamptdon, carelessly.

"Aristodème's, not mine. He loves that room. From that room he can see the chimneys of the Maison Malafré; he cannot see within the walls. Quel dommage! He cannot see within the walls and behold the

mice upon her dressing-table. My room is here, this end. I love to awake, throw open the window, and look down the valley. There is the sunshine, and the glow of the morning. I can see the spire of the cathedral at d'Arcy-Renaud from my window. You are at the Trois Princes, is it not? I can almost see the Trois Princes, Beel, not quite. How was your friend with the adorable name when you returned, Beel? Mistare Cluggs. O mon Dieu! Cluggs!"

"Ah! Cluggs? He was very fit, I imagine. He wants to come up here. I wonder if your hus—if the Count will allow me to bring him?"

"Well," said Valencia, slowly, "that is a thing I do not know. It would do no harm to ask. I should love to see a person named Cluggs, me! But I think that Aristodème would not wish to know a person of the name of Cluggs. I never saw a person named Cluggs."

"I don't suppose you ever did."

"No, nor a son of a Sir who makes the beer. Let us go and ask Aristodème, Beel."

It was the step of the Count which sounded on the veranda.

"I am somewhat fatigued to-day, Monsieur 'Amp'done. My cereals have not arrived. I am very dependent upon my cereals. Valencie, you must not fail to drive with Alceste to the boutique in the morning. Edmond does not rise until too late, and Phigie has always her knitting to do. Alceste is stupid, and I—I am growing thin—I——"

"I will go with great pleasure, Aristodème." A glance at Hamptdon. "At what time, Aristodème?"

"You may go before déjeuner, Valencie. Demain matin, avant le déjeuner."

"I can go at ten," said Valencia, with another look at her friend.

"I will order Alceste for ten o'clock."

"And may I drive as far as Roxane, the blanchisseuse, Aristodème?"

"Has she not brought the clothes, child?"

"It is of some clothes that I wish to speak, Aristodème. May I go so far?"

"If you will be back in time, Valencie, and not delay the arrival of the cereals. And now, Monsieur 'Amp'done, we will go over the château."

Valencia knew that they would not approach her room, but for fear of something of the kind she ran up and locked herself in, and sat before the glass taking off and putting on her wonderful necklace. "Five—hundred—thousand—francs,—five—hundred—thousand—francs," she said over and over to herself. "Aristodème is ignorant of what a treasure he has in the house—he that has married a fortune and does not know it, and please the bon Dieu he shall never know. No, not until his death. He must die, poor old Aristodème. It is a pity that I cannot go first, me! that he might be happy with his dear Madame Malafré, but it was not to be. I must live, I suppose." Valencia stretched out her arms, wearily. "They tell me that Monsieur Malafré died but three days after we were married with each other. Quel dommage! Well, as he lies on his bed of death, poor Aristodème, I shall tap at the door very timidly. Madame Malafré will be sitting holding his hand, and between dying gasps he will be saying, 'Petit chou,' 'Bijou,' 'Bébée,' Madame Malafré will hold up her hand and say, 'Quiet! he wishes no noise,' but for me, I will go

over to the poor old Aristodème and will say, 'Aristodème, my husband,' with a look at Madame Malafré, 'I have some news for you.' Madame Malafré will frown, but I shall look at her proudly, for am I not Countess d'Alêne? and I shall bend down and whisper in his ear, 'Aristodème, listen! Do you know you have married une héritière, do you know that I am possessed of five—hundred—thousand—francs?' I shall say it very slow, so! Five—hundred—thousand—francs, and I should not be at all surprised if that would bring him to life again, and that would be a—" Valencia nodded at herself in the glass two or three times, trickled the pearls through her fingers, and then went to the dressing-table and got her scissors. She laid the necklace carefully on the table, and as carefully cut one string. A great ball of milky white rolled away across the dresser, then another, and another. She rethreaded them all but one, and then securely fastened the string within the hole of the clasp. She passed some time in cutting the other strings, securing the seven pearls, and in threading the loose ones, but at last all were safely rolled in a bit of paper, and the ribbon which tied it well fastened. She pushed the little parcel back in the washstand drawer, behind the soap-dish, close to her wedding-ring. As she did so, she heard Count Aristodème's voice outside the door. "This is my wife's room," he said, and they passed on.

Another night of some wakefulness, of tossing and feverish worry, another early rise, and after the weary first breakfast the antiquated carriage which had been in use in Count Aristodème's grandfather's day drove

to the back door. The young girl came out and climbed into the high seat. "A tout à l'heure, Aristodème," she called to her husband, who came trotting out after her. "I will certainly see to the cereals, the flaked rice, the oatmeal, the semola, the cracked wheat, the rye, all shall have a proper part of my attention, and the blanchisseuse—I think you wanted me to be particular about the blanchisseuse."

Valencia drove away from the house and down the hill before he could make answer. At the bottom Alceste turned and ran through the tunnel over which stood the château, and came out into the hour-glass. When the carriage reached the narrow place in the rocks, Valencia turned and waved her hand, but there was no one to reply. Her goings and comings were of little account. Phigie was knitting, Count Edmond was not visible, and Count Aristodème was taking his way up through her garden toward the Maison Malafré.

"I wonder where she sees him," thought the girl, "if she but treats him to the mice!"

As the carriage rolled and creaked slowly onward, Valencia kept a bright lookout for Hamptdon. They were at the curve of the road now. It could not be long until they reached the waterfall. She peered eagerly through the branches, she looked behind every tree. "Drive slower, Alceste," she said. "More slowly. This old carriage gives one une attaque des nerfs." They were now proceeding at snail's pace. No Beel came in sight. Where could he be? Had he understood her? It was true he had demurred at this manner of meeting her, but he was going away, to-morrow perhaps, and how should she get the pearls to him! Slowly as they drove, no Beel rewarded her search.

What could have happened? Was he ill? Perhaps! She must get Aristodème to send down and see, and then the thought came to her, that Aristodème would be able to imagine no reason for such inquiry.

"Perhaps it was on the way home he expected to meet me. I will walk home," she suddenly decided. "Drive faster, Alceste. These horses must be a hundred years old."

"They are very good horses, Madame la Comtesse. Oh, but excellent horses. They are not so old, they are——"

"And now you will call them chevaux de race or chevaux de course, which, Alceste? Oh! do drive on. Do!"

"François Premier has the age of twenty-one years, Madame la Comtesse. He passes over the road very fast for his age."

"Oui, avec une rapidité dangereuse; and the other?"

"Cleopatre? She is just two years older, Madame la Comtesse, but the ladies are only as old as they look. One would think her hardly nineteen at most."

"Ah, Alceste, good Alceste, do cease talking and drive, I big you, with more haste. We shall never be back in time for breakfast."

CHAPTER III

IT was also to-morrow at d'Arcy-Renaud. Hamptdon was not quite satisfied with himself as he sat in his room at the Trois Princes, at the hour of half after ten o'clock. Valencia had asked him to meet her on the road to Chatillon. He had tacitly agreed to do so. He had demurred, of course, but when he parted from her she had felt sure that he would come. After all, what harm? The child's only desire was to get rid of the pearls with which he was to buy the articles she wished. What harm would it have done to meet her just for a moment? He was going away to-morrow, alas, alas! He should probably never see her again. She must stay there with those old people until she died of inanition, simply for the want of young spirits about her to keep her alive.

Suddenly he started to his feet, looking at his watch as he did so. He would go. She must have passed by this time the waterfall which she had named as their meeting-place, but he would follow her on to Chatillon. Possibly he should see her in the shop. She could hand him the little packet. It was such a small favor to ask! It would be over in a moment; he knew what to do with them; and then, and then, that would be all. His friend had gone on a tramp. He was alone. He would go at once.

He ran down the stairs and out of the hotel. He crossed the square under the shadow of the old cathedral, and was soon out of the town and on the country road. After twenty minutes' walk the wood about Salvaresse came in sight. He passed by the Abbaye de Bref, of which he had heard from Valencia, and soon was winding up the highway that joined the other less travelled road, which ran over the hill, past the château and the Maison Malafré. Here he struck through the wood and walked on until he heard the waterfall gurgling below him. Just then the sound of wheels fell upon his ear and the slow jog-trot of tired old carriage horses who only go because they must. Looking downward, he saw that it was the carriage from Salvaresse. Alceste sat in faded gentility on the high front seat, but Valencia was not with him. Ah! probably she had decided not to go to Chatillon after all. She trusted to his coming again to the château. Such had been the behavior of the girls whom he had known, but Valencia was not like those. He had never seen one like her. He could not imagine her anything but perfectly straightforward. He sat among the leaves of the hillside and thought for a moment, the same thoughts that had been hammering at his brain ever since she had revealed herself to him. Poor little Valencia! Lonely little creature! And then, he was aroused by hearing the sound of voices, a high imperious voice, and a taunting laugh, a man's laugh, which sounded more familiar. He arose and walked slowly down the hill, and stood among the thick foliage looking toward the direction from which the voices came. Just as he reached this point, Valencia rounded the curve at the right. She was walking very fast. Her face was

flushed. She held her head high. By her side walked a man, and as Hamptdon caught sight of him the man laid his hand upon the girl's shoulder and leaped toward her, bringing his lips near her cheek. They were just beneath him now. Hamptdon had sprung downward and was upon the bully, had him flat on the road, and had given him a blow which dazed him, before the other could realize it. When he looked up, Valencia was standing by the little waterfall, crying bitterly.

"It is those brutes of English that insult women," she said. "We do not know of it in France. I am always safe along the road; I did not dream of it."

"You cad! You wretched, contemptible cad!" said Hamptdon, giving the prostrate man another blow.

Hamptdon sat astride the struggling form beneath him. His position was not graceful, and had Valencia not been so angry she would have laughed aloud. Hamptdon turned his head toward her. "Vous avez fait une sottise," he said in his best English French. "Il faut qu' vous vous en alliez."

"Connaissez-vous ce monsieur?" asked Valencia, in bitterly angry tones.

"Il faut que vous vous en alliez," repeated Hamptdon, shortly, and Valencia turned and disappeared up the hill. When she was quite out of sight, Hamptdon arose, and Mr. Cluggs—for it was he—followed his example, and wiped the mud off his clothes.

"It wasn't enough provocation to make you spoil a suit of Poole's," he said.

"I really didn't think you were so much of a cad," said Hamptdon. "Poole can go to hell, and you can follow him."

"I don't think I shall," said Cluggs, angrily, "not to please you." He tried vainly to discover what had happened to his back and how he was looking. "Why do you care that I try to kiss the village beauty? They don't mind it in England."

Hamptdon stalked on in the direction of d'Arcy-Renaud.

"You needn't speak to me," said he. "I fancy our friendship is at an end, as well as our acquaintance."

"Just for a village beauty. I didn't think you were so Quixotic, Hamptdon. I suppose now you won't take me to call on the Countess d'Alêne."

"That was the Countess d'Alêne, the lady you insulted. Judge for yourself."

"That the Countess d'Alêne, walking along the highway alone?"

"Don't ladies walk along the highway in England?" asked Hamptdon, savagely.

"Yes, but it's all so different over there, you would know who——"

"Who to insult, I suppose. Well, you can't insult that lady. I suppose you are clear on that point."

"She had on all her finery in the morning, just like a country belle, a string of common Roman pearls——"

"Seven strings of pearls that cost twenty thousand pounds in Bond Street," roared Hamptdon in his ear. "Ask Barrington," and then, in quieter tones; "but I forgot, you won't be able to, for you won't know us any more."

"Oh, I don't know," said Mr. Alfred Cluggs. "You'll come to your senses. After this little coolness has blown over——"

"We sha'n't know you," reiterated Hamptdon. "I have always scouted the idea that gentlemen were born, not made, but I see now that because a man makes beer and gets a title he can't expect to have a gentleman's feelings all at once. It will take you just ten generations, Cluggs; and while you are rising in the social scale I think my family and I will bid you farewell."

"Phew! I have made a muck of it."

"You have indeed," and thus a friendship, not the first, was severed for all time through the unintentional agency of an innocent woman.

CHAPTER IV

IT was the next day, his last day. It had come and, alas! it must go. Hamptdon had seen the luggage of his sometime friend taken down the stairs and placed on the stage which ran to the gare twice a day, he had heard the whistle of the train as it arrived and departed, and he had sat at the little table in front of the Trois Princes, wishing the time away, for he meant to make a flying visit to the château, get the parcel from Valencia, make his adieux, and go away from—from—well, why not confess it to himself, say it plump out—from all that he loved, forever.

As he wound over the hill in front of the Maison Malafré he wondered where he should find her. In the garden, of course, and there she was, as he had hoped and expected. "I wondered if you would be here," he said.

"And why not, Beel? Where else have I to go?"

Hamptdon had thought long and seriously of the girl during the day that had elapsed since he had seen her. She was so unprotected, so alone, so unguarded. He dwelt upon the splendid promise of her youth and what the future must bring to her. Suppose that some agreeable villain of the Cluggs type should gain friendship with the family, and access to the château, and should use his opportunities as he, Hamptdon, felt that he might

have done had he not cared for Valencia too much. What might not be the result?

"Valencia," he said, "come and sit down here by me. I am going away in about ten minutes. I may never see you again."

"But you will send me the clothes and the rings, Beel," she said, brightly. She drew the parcel from her pocket, opened it, to see that the seven pearls were there, not one missing, and placed it in his hand.

He sighed. Clearly it made little difference to her whether he went or stayed. His going would be more in accordance with Valencia's wish, for it meant a quick fruition of her hopes.

"Yes," he said, "I will send the clothes and the rings. Have you the measures?"

For answer she took his hand and drew off his signet ring, and put it on her finger. "See how large it is, Beel. There! Can you not judge from the space that is left? I could give you my wedding-ring, that fits quite well."

"Oh, no, Valencia! No! what are you saying! Of course, I could not take your wedding-ring. Yes, I see. I think I know pretty well. Now the dress measure."

"See, I have the measure in my pocket. The centimetres are marked. To this pin is my skirt, to this pin my waist. Can you remember, Beel?"

"I don't think I shall mistake your waist for your skirt," said he, laughing a little.

"Your laugh is sad, Beel. It has no joy in it. Why is that?"

Valencia leaned against her one friend confidingly.

"Don't, Valencia. Don't sit so. Don't lounge; it is not proper."

"'And not propare? And why should the Honorable William Hamptdon tell me what is propare and what is not? Do I not know? I, the Countess d'Alêne?"

"I'm afraid you don't, Lonci. You are a very unsophisticated child."

At these plain words Valencia drew back, and sat sullen and angry with this, her only friend.

Hamptdon was lost in a brown study. How powerless he was! This charming child, his little friend of Bordighera days, was as much out of his reach as if she had died and been buried with her father in that place which she had called Caleeforniah.

Ze 'onorab' Veeliam 'Amp'done sat looking at Valencia and thinking at what cross purposes we play in this world. He pondered long and silently. Here was an adorable creature, throbbing with life, brimming over with love for somebody, something, somewhere; anything, anywhere! The house of her heart stood empty, garnished, swept and ready for the welcome of some guest of whom she could make an idol. As to that guest adoring her in return, such phase of the subject had not seemed to enter her calculations. She had more, much more than she needed of a certain commodity, and she unconsciously longed to pour out the libation on the heads of those who would receive it; but alas! the proprietor of the secret chamber of her heart, if he had not put out a sign warning trespassers not to approach those sacred premises, still owned this valuable property in fee simple. Though he took little interest in his great treasure, it was his by right, and he could not imagine that any mortal, stranger or other, would be so audacious as to dream of taking it from him. Nor did anyone dream

of attempting such a barefaced piece of robbery; and then Hamptdon groaned aloud.

"Why did I lose sight of her?" he half murmured. "Why did I lose sight of her?"

"What have you lost, Beel?" asked Valencia, between two bites of a particularly fine cherry.

Hamptdon did not answer.

That this young creature, all life, full of hope, with nothing to hope for, bubbling over with health and spirits, made for the very greatest happiness that earth could give, should be condemned to pass the remainder of her days with old and stupid people, nonentities themselves or else—suddenly there flashed across his memory the look which he had seen pass from Madame Malafré to the young girl on the occasion of that first breakfast at the château. Valencia, all unconscious of giving annoyance, had appealed to the old Count. She had exclaimed, "Aristodème!" Getting no response, she had turned laughingly to Hamptdon: "Do the English husbands pay as little attention to their wives as mine? Do they not never answer? My husband is not deaf, only sometimes, to me. Is it not so, Aristodème?" Her husband had turned at this laughing reproach and had said: "What wilt thou, petite? Do I not always answer thee, chérie?" and then had come a vicious look from Madame Malafré's beady black eyes, the which being interpreted according to Hamptdon, had meant, "Were you but dead!"

He looked up at Valencia, who was sitting discreetly three feet away from him now, her brow wrinkled, her face full of clouds. "Are you and Madame Malafré friends?" he asked.

"If we are friends!" Valencia laughed again. "I should think we are not friends. Intimate enemies, if you like. But how should she like me? I am ever teasing her. I love that teasing of Madame Malafré."

"How can you tease her? Madame Malafré is much older than you. How will she permit herself to be teased by you?"

"It is nothing that I say, at least not to her. She cannot do nothing. I amuse myself very much. I go close, very close, to Aristodème; that is when she is here. Never when she is not here. I then shower sweet words upon him. I take his hand, I stroke his shoulder, I tutoyer him then; at no other time. I say, 'Dost thou not know what thou hast said to me in our chamber but this morning, Aristodème, before I was awake?' You should see her shiver. You should see how he appears puzzled. He draws his hand away. He is a little afraid of her, is Aristodème; and when I stroke his shoulder, and knock off his cap quite by accident, that I may pick it up again and put it on tenderly, her eyes dart lightning, like a snake's. She opens her mouth, and I see her tongue like a serpent's red fangs. If she could shoot out that lightning and strike me dead, she would do so; of that I am certain."

"Don't do it any more, Lonci. Promise me! Don't do it any more."

"And why? That is my only amusement. Do you know how lonely I am when you are not here, Beel? Mon Dieu! So lonely! She cannot kill me if she will. They do not kill each other—ladies—in these days. Her eyes are sharp, but they cannot shoot like those cannon that my father took me to see at Douvres, or like those

guns made by Mistare Krupp. She is not even a toy pistol. Oh, no! I am not afraid of Madame Malafré."

"Still, Lonci, do not anger her. It makes me very nervous to leave you here alone with them—with her."

"She does not live with us. Her glances cannot kill. I am not afraid of my husband's loveress, Beel. Beel," she resumed after a few moments, "you said you have a sister in Paris, did you not?"

"Yes, she is living there. I was going there to see her, and you, Lonci—to see you, to carry you your pearls. Why?"

"Beel, do you think, if things get very bad with me here, she will take me there for a little visit?"

"I should think she might, Lonci. I will ask her."

"I would not offer myself, me! But, Beel, to stay here all the winter, in the snow, with those four, I think I shall die." The tears stood in her eyes. In Paris I could go about with you and see all the lovely sights, and I could sell more of the pearls, and buy more of the——"

"I should not be there, Lonci," said the Honorable William, never more so than at that moment. "I will speak to my sister, and ask her to write to you. Her husband is our chargé d'affaires, you know that?"

"I did not know it. I only want to know someone who is kind and good like you, Beel, dear Beel." Hamptdon arose.

"And now, Lonci, good-by. I shall not see you again."

As Hamptdon ceased speaking, a raucous voice was screaming, "Valencie, Valencie, viens ici, tout de suite."

Valencia burst into a gay laugh. "That is Charlemagne," she said.

"Appelles-tu moi Charlemagne, mon bébé?" she called over the hedge. "Je viendrai! un peu plus tard. I tutoyer Charlemagne," she explained to Hamptdon. "No one else, only Phigie. Viens ici, mon bébé. See, now, how he will come to me."

Hamptdon approached the hedge and looked downward. On the stretch of grass between the bottom of the terrace and the walls of the château he perceived a large black bird hobbling awkwardly in the direction of a very tall tree.

"Mon bébé, mon oiseau, ma petite pie!" again called Valencia.

The bird stopped in his walk, turned his head on one side, looked upward to where the two were standing, and, after a moment of hesitation, proceeded on his way.

"How well he obeys!" laughed Hamptdon. "Do all the ménagerie mind as well?"

"We have no ménagerie," said Valencia. "Nothing more than a cat and two horses, François Premier and Cleopatre. Sometimes I think they must have belonged to those people for whom they are named. They are certainly as old. O mon Dieu! for something a little more young!"

The bird now stood still, looking upward into the tree, where Hamptdon, following his glance, perceived a very large nest high overhead.

"He doesn't obey, does he?" laughed Hamptdon at Valencia's anxiety to make the bird mind.

"That is because he wishes to go somewhere else. See, he has a piece of colored glass in his hand, his foot then. That is what makes him awkward. I fear he will cut his foot. See, now! I will make him mind me! Go to thy nest, Charlemagne—go!"

The bird, who had been fluttering his wings, and had made one or two unsuccessful efforts to rise from the ground, lifted himself in air simultaneously with Valencia's words, and flew to the nest overhead. "Le voilà! You see that I have only to speak."

"I see," said Hamptdon. "There is Félix again. He is calling."

"Let him call," said Valencia. "He will discover who is the owner of this garden, he!"

"Well, Lonci, child, this must come to an end." Hamptdon looked around the garden, so familiar after three days' acquaintance. "I must go."

Valencia burst into a gay laugh. "You say that, and yet you will be here to-morrow. Well, then, it is good-by until to-morrow."

"To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow," quoted Hamptdon, sadly. "Good-by, and good-by, dear. Good-by for a long, long time—many years, perhaps." Hamptdon was dreaming of a day when the old Count should have shuffled off this mortal coil, and he, the Honorable William, had made money enough in the lucrative pursuit of architecture to——

"Go down and see them all, Beel. Then come up here, and say good-by to me— Here in my garden."

Hamptdon arose obediently and went down to the château. He found no one awake but the Countess Iphigénie. She sat on the side veranda, knitting. The thirty-two turquoises bobbed and jangled as she put the zephyr over the needle and drew it slowly through.

"I have come to say farewell, Countess," said Hamptdon. The Countess smiled upward as if there were nothing to say. Count Edmond, aroused by these words,

took the yellow silk kerchief from his bald head and said, "Hein?"

Count Aristodème was nowhere to be seen.

"My brother has gone this morning to see our old friend, Madame Malafré. He will be sorry. You should see his wife." The Countess Edmond took up the stitch that the Englishman had made her drop, and called, lazily, "Valonthia, Valonthia. She is away somewhere," she said, smiling placidly. "I will make your adieux to her, and to our brother."

When Hamptdon came again into the garden, Valencia said: "Give me your address here in this little book. I may wish it some time; I cannot tell." She looked up laughing, but Hamptdon saw the tears standing under the deep lashes. He wrote his address in London, at the back of the book and upside down. "Madame Malafré won't read that easily," said he, "if she comes spying."

"Sit down, Beel," said Valencia. "Sit down once again. I have something to give you. A last thing. You will be surprised. It is a remembrance of my father and the old days at Bordighera. Promise that, after I have given it to you, you will go straight away and will not look behind. If you do, Beel, you will be turned into a salt pillar. You know there were some people in a land named Sodome and——"

"I have heard the story, Lonci," said Hamptdon. His heart was in his throat, for this was in truth their parting.

"Seat yourself, Beel."

Hamptdon sat down. "What will she give me?" he wondered. "A rose? Ah! I will keep it forever, a——"

Valencia's hands closed over his eyes. She turned back his face and gave him a kiss upon his lips, a dewy kiss, a child's kiss. "It is good-by to my childhood," she said. "Now, go! go! go!" The words came fast between her sobs, and he stumbled along to the gate, down the steps, down into the road, and onward to the town, in a daze. Valencia threw herself upon the bench and cried her heart out.

What would he have thought could he but have known that Madame Malafré, the woman whom he feared, was descending the hill at the moment? She had witnessed the parting. She may be likened to the serpent in Paradise, with the exception of the fact that she was not the tempter, and did not appear until after the fall.

Valencia lay upon the bench, sobbing. She had relinquished everything of her early youth. There was nothing left her. She was in a strange land, with strange people. She had been trying to become accustomed to them, when the appearance of her old friend had broken in upon her reserve. Eh bien? She should never, never see him again. He would be as dead to her henceforth as her old life—as dead as her dear father. In giving her farewell kiss to Hamptdon, she had said good-by to the old life, to her childhood, to her father, and to him.

To her comes Madame Malafré. She bent over the young girl, and looked her piercingly in the eyes.

"Vous-avez du sang rouge?" said she.

"Le plupart des animaux ont du sang rouge," said Valencia, sitting up. "And why should I not possess the red blood? I am young. It is only the old who have the thin white blood. That makes the wrinkles."

Madame Malafré stood regarding the girl. Then she called, in her commanding if thin voice: "Mon ami, come! Come here." The Count turned as he entered the garden, and came along the path. Madame Malafré faced him, pointing to Valencia.

"Look at your wife, mon ami."

The Count did as he was requested. He saw a very goodly young creature standing before him. Her face was flushed and shining with tears. He smiled at Valencia, saying: "Well, I see her. She is a tall slip of a girl."

"Did you see her but now?"

"No," said the Count, wondering. "I did not know she was in the garden."

"She was not only in the garden, but she was here with a stranger, that English Sir. They have had a very tender parting. One would say from its fervor that it is not the last time they will meet."

Valencia was standing regarding Madame Malafré now with glittering eye. "I may say that I hope it is not the last time, Madame. Certainly I hope so."

"Ah!" said the mystified Count. "What was it, Valencie? Why does Madame Malafré speak in that tone? Why does she so regard thee?"

"I suppose it is because I kissed my friend good-by. It was nothing. It was not his fault, he! All mine." Madame Malafré's face was lighted with a vicious smile.

"Shameless girl! See how she betrays thine honor, mon ami."

The Count, surprised on his own account, and very angry because this new tone of Madame Malafré told him that it was his duty to be, turned an astonished look upon his young wife.

"Valencie," he said, "can this be true?"

"It is quite true," she said, carelessly. "L'hypocrisie est pire que la brusquerie. Have I ever told you an untruth?"

"A married woman, my wife! and that thou hast k—" The Count could not bring himself to repeat the obnoxious word. "That thou hast embraced a young man and a stranger of but a few days' acquaintance, here, in the open day?"

"Was it not better than in the dark? He—but you mistake in one thing, Aristodème—he is my friend. I have known him since I was a little thing no larger than that, long and long before I knew you. Beel would not hurt a fly. He is my only friend. He is going away. Do not we always wish our friends a farewell of affection?"

"Is this the way you will continue, young Madame?" said her tormentor, glaring at the girl. "These are American habits, I suppose?"

"For me, I do not know American habits, rather French, but these are just my own habits. And if I will kiss all other friends good-by, as I did Beel, you ask? How can I kiss anyone else good-by—I that have no other friend?"

"But—but—but—Valencie," stammered the Count, who had been trying vainly to make himself heard. "It is not usual for young men and girls to behave with so much of freedom."

"I am a married woman," said Valencia. "I have heard that the French wives often part from their friends so; but for that you need not fear, Aristodème. I shall not offend again. Beel is gone. There is no one else."

The Count stood shaking his head. He gazed at the girl in wonder.

"It seems as if thou hadst no circumspection, no judgment, Valencie. That thou hast no prudence. Thou hast not learned the ways of women with men. Has it come to this, then, that thou canst not be left alone with a young man? Must I shut thee up? Thou shouldst learn propriety."

"I will, Aristodème." Valencia gave a low courtesy. "I will learn of propriety from Madame Malafré. She will teach me how to conduct myself when I am alone with a monsieur—much, perhaps, as she conducts herself when alone with you."

Two red spots appeared on Madame Malafré's cheeks. Her eyes blazed. She was almost handsome. She looked as if she would fall upon the young girl and tear her in pieces.

"Mon ami! Shall this girl insult me before you?" she said. "I that have known you——"

"Valencia," exclaimed the Count, "go to thy room. Think this over, and, when thou art prepared to apologize to Madame Malafré, come and tell me so."

Valencia made a second courtesy. Her cheeks were on fire. "And not until then shall I leave my room? Is that what you would say, Aristodème? Ah! then, I shall remain there until the day of my death. It is like being at the convent once more. I hope that you are prepared to obtain an extra servant to bring me my dinners and breakfasts. For me, I am a very hungry girl. It will take a great deal of someone's time," and she added in a mocking tone: "Good-by, dear husband; I leave my bench and my seclusion to Madame Malafré and to you."

"An incorrigible!" exclaimed Madame Malafré. "Oh! but an incorrigible! My poor friend! When I think what might have been——"

Valencia turned away and ran swiftly down to the château.

She put her head in at the kitchen door. "Radegonde," she called, "set a large tray. I am very hungry; I have the appetite of ten old people. Oserai-je vous demander une grâce? Send me up every delicacy the château affords. I am to breakfast in company with only Charlemagne. Bring all — everything." Radegonde had caught the sound of angry voices. At present she was not so much in love with Valencia, but she hated Madame Malafré with a holy hatred.

"Certainement," answered Radegonde, "si cela depend de moi."

"Je vous remercie," called back Valencia.

"Cela ne vaut pas la peine d'en parler. Je ferai tout ce que dépendra de moi pour obliger, Madame la Comtesse," called Radegonde, loudly, scenting a mystery, for she perceived, as she glanced out of the kitchen window, Madame Malafré slowly approaching the house. She was leaning with more than her usual devotion upon the arm of the Count d'Alêne.

Because of this unpleasant scene, Valencia did not until some days later miss the little book wherein Hamptdon had written his address, a little dark-blue book where butterflies of silver disported themselves upon the cover. When next she went to the garden she searched the bench, the ground, the paths, but the book had vanished.

CHAPTER V.

A FEW days after Hamptdon's departure, Mr. and Mrs. Quentin, with their young niece, came to pay a second visit to Salvaresse. Valencia welcomed their advent with a secret joy, which, however, she did not make apparent to the family. It did not concern them that she wanted young society. They had never cared whether she lacked anything or not. Her pleasure was to be her own; they should not share it.

Valencia, who had released herself from durance after her first day's seclusion, offered to take Gartha Valery up the hill into her garden. Gartha accepted gladly, as she had some questions to ask of the young Countess. When they had entered the gate, and she had sniffed at some of the roses, she turned to Valencia, "Are you unhappy?" she asked.

"No, not particularly."

Gartha looked somewhat disappointed. "Oh!" said she, "they called you that—that—'unhappy young thing over at Salvaresse.'"

"Why should I be unhappy?" said Valencia, proudly. "Have I not everything that heart can wish?" She fingered her pearls as she spoke. They shone out well against the blue cotton which the blanchisseuse had just returned.

"Have you a child?" asked Gartha.

"No," said Valencia.

"That is strange," said Gartha. "How long a time it requires to have a child. My aunt has now been married for two or three months, and she has not had one neither. You are slow at that, all the two of you, not? A very large cat came to the mill once at Noël. She had six on the Jour de l'An. Ces animaux sont bien sages. That was a quick affair! How long have you lived at Salvaresse?"

"It is all of six months now," said Valencia. She laid her hands on Gartha's bony shoulders. "I am glad that you came. You are young; I love the things that are young."

"Do you never see a young thing up here?"

"No, never! If I except the pies which live up there in the old tree. The wife of that pie has had seven little pies in the spring, but they soon grow old. An English friend has been here. He was nearer to being young than the others. He had a mustache."

"Is not John Quentin's mustache a fine one? It is better than the little gentleman's with eyes like the large gooseberries that we have at the Abbey. His mustache must be waxed with its two stiff points. Who is that little fat gentleman? He looks as if he ate only meal and corn."

"He eats little else. He is my husband," said Valencia. "He eats cereals. Do you like cereals?"

"When I am in Scotland I eat them. How did you come to be so in love of the little gentleman as to marry with him?"

"I was not consulted," said Valencia, plucking a large pink rose. "Smell! oh, smell!" She held it to

Gartha's nostrils. "Would you like it and another, and another? You may have all you want; they are all mine. They are young, like you." She began snipping and gathering a great armful of flowers for her new young friend. "I was at the convent," she said. "My father was dead. I had no one."

"That must be triste to have one's father dead. My father is a very handsome man. He wears beautiful clothes." Valencia smiled faintly, but turned quickly away, that Gartha might not be hurt. She had heard of Mr. Valery's costumes.

"And who is the other little gentleman?"

"That is my beau-frère Edmond."

"He is what Valery would call a poor copy of yours."

"I think mine is the best," said Valencia, as if she were glad to be able to be satisfied with something, at the same time sticking a great carnation in Gartha's hair. Her tone wavered a little, as if she had drawn a rather doubtful prize in a lottery.

"But how can you be the wife and the sister of such old people? Must we not remain in our generation? They should be your grandfathers."

"I had no choice, me!" said Valencia. "It was better than the convent. The sisters were kind, but I was shut in. I could not see the streets, nor the country, never! Here you see I have my garden. They gave it to me. Was not that kind?"

"Y—y—yes," said Gartha, "if you wanted a garden. For me the gardeners may do all that work. That is what I prefer."

"Mine is not a fine garden, like those at the Abbey," said Valencia, humbly. "It is only a wild garden, but

it is all mine. I work in it myself. I sowed those soucis and the pervenches. I live up here. Sometimes I do not go down not even to déjeuner. They call and they call, but I do not answer, me! Why should I care to see Aristodème——"

"The copy?"

"No, the original! Mine! Why should I care to see him eat large dishes of the cereals and see Edmond——"

"The copy?"

"Yes—complain about the ragoût or the pilau, and see Phigie——"

"An original, or a copy?"

"Just herself—my belle-sœur—stuff herself with sugar, and sweets, and not say a word; and then go out on the veranda and knit, knit, knit, and I envying her all the time those turquoises, until I think I shall die. But I am to have some jewels, too. Emeralds! Rings! Thirty-two! As many as those that Phigie wears. They are to come from Paris."

"Then she will envy you."

Valencia sighed. "She will not see them," she said. (After all, what value in possession unless some can be made envious?)

"Did you ever know my uncle Bruno?"

"No, I think not. I know no one but those four down there—the sisters, and my uncle Lonsdale, and my English friend. I could count them on my fingers. Who is your uncle Bruno?"

"He is dead. He was a malefactor," said Gartha, with pride. She plucked a late cherry and buried her teeth in its red flesh. "He was a âme damnée, so Mamasha said."

"Who is Mamasha?"

"She is really my grandmother, but we make the pretence that she is my aunt." Gartha said "h'awnt." "She likes it. John Quentin says it is a necessary fraud. They like to humor her. She does not come often. Sometimes I go to call her 'Grandmother!' So! and see what she does. I might say Bonne-Maman. John Quentin tells me quite solemnly that I must not; that it would be the death of her, and that then I should be arrested for the crime of murder. Her name is the Lady Eldon."

"You know a great many people," said Valencia. "That must be very pleasant."

"Cela dépend!" replied Gartha. "Not when they are Mamashas."

"Gartha, Gartha, where are you?"

"That is Alixe's voice; I must go now." Gartha gathered up her great bundle of roses. "I wish I could see the little pies."

"They are big pies now. The old one lives here always. He comes to my window and taps on the blind, and calls: 'Wake up, wake up. The day is breaking.' It is pretty to hear him. When I say to him, 'Hé, bébé! le temps est un peu couvert,' he replies as well as you or me, 'Ce n'est que la rosée, il s'éclaircira.'"

"He must know more than any of the people about here. What a clever bird!"

"Gartha, Gartha! Come! child, come!"

When the Quentins were out of earshot of the château two conversations took place.

"What a charming creature that is," said Count Aristodème. "Ah, petite, do you think you will ever be like that?"

Valencia shook her head sadly.

"She is much too tall, that Madame Quentin," said Madame Malafré, with an unpleasant look at Valencia. "Her upper lip is too short." Madame Malafré's upper lip was longer than any other part of her anatomy.

"So is mine," said Valencia, delighted to find that she had some point, if even a bad point, in common with their charming neighbor. "Her hair touches the top of her flounce when she lets it fall. Gartha told me so." She fixed a scrutinizing glance on Madame Malafré's "mice," all pinned on in the best of form. "She holds her head like a cheval de race."

"She used to stoop," said Count Aristodème. "She holds herself quite erect now. A charming creature! quite a charming creature!"

Madame Malafré arose and drew her shawl about her flabby shoulders.

"I must go home," she said, and with scant adieux went down the garden path, Count Aristodème trotting after her, discovering too late that he had offended his life-long friend in praising another and a younger woman.

When he had aided her up the steps, she seated herself, panting, on a bench in Valencia's garden.

"Aristodème," she said, "I have something to say to thee, and that is a very serious matter. Hast thou noticed the pearls that Valencia wears?"

"Noticed them, ma petite? Why, I gave them to her myself."

"Not those, Aristodème. Not those! Thou hast never given her those pearls. They are wonderful! They are worth a fortune, and a good fortune at that."

"They are simply Roman pearls," said the Count. "They cost exactly thirty francs fifty centimes at the Louvre. When we were married, petite," his tone was apologetic, "I was forced to give the child something."

"That is nonsense, nonsense! Do I not know what pearls are? Have not I had experience?"

"Alas, yes!" sighed Count Aristodème, his thought dwelling for a moment upon his defunct rival, the jeweller of the Rue de la Paix.

"I can tell a fine jewel the moment I look at it. Those turquoise of thy belle-sœur! Some are good, some bad. She mingles them so that no one will know. I should say that she has twenty good ones and twelve bad ones. The diamonds are real, but they are small."

"Thou mayst be right, thou mayst be right," the Count shook his head, still unconvinced, "but that necklace of the little Valencie is only of Roman pearls, nothing more."

Madame Malafré burst into tears. "Thou art deceiving me," she said. "Thou art deceiving me. Thou hast expended an enormous sum on that chit, and I have nothing but this petty ring from thee since the last Jour de l'An."

The poor Count gazed in distress at his friend. It was cruel of her to reproach him. He who had saved all that was possible from the household accounts to purchase the pretty topaz ring that ornamented her middle finger.

"Mon ami, mon ami! Petite fille! Bijou! Chérie! Do not! Do not! Thou art mistaken, thou art indeed. The pearls cost only what I have told thee. The child must have some wedding gift. I will hunt for the bill

in my escritoire. I will bring it and show it to thee. I pledge thee my soul, chérie, that those simple little pearls, such as a child wears for her first little party, are all that I have ever given to Valencie. I swear it to thee, Thérèse; wilt thou not believe? Thou seest through the eyes of jealousy—thou dost not trust me. Who has been more faithful than I?"

The Count, in truth, was growing somewhat weary of his faithfulness, for it seemed not to relieve him at all of Madame Malafré's espionage. When they were alone she asked innumerable questions about Valencia, when he saw her, the appearance of her room, how the furniture was placed, to all of which questions the old Count answered: "God knows! I never go there."

Madame Malafré sobbed out her jealous heart on Count Aristodème's shoulder. If it were an old shoulder, it was still the shoulder of a count, and Madame Malafré had ever had a longing to join the noble army of the dominating race. When her eyes were dry, she allowed her lover to lead her up the hill. Slowly they ascended, seating themselves from time to time upon the benches that lined the walk. By the time they had reached the Maison Malafré, she had so far recovered that Count Aristodème was easily induced to spend the afternoon at the Maison Malafré. He returned to Salvaresse in time for the late dinner, beaming with smiles.

When the visitors had reached the road, and were walking along on the way to the Abbey, Mrs. Quentin turned to her husband.

"John," she said, "did you notice that child's pearls?"

"No," said Quentin. "What child? I saw no child."

"The little Countess. The young wife of that old man. How could they marry her to him! What a sacrifice!"

"She said she liked it," said Gartha; "that she was tired of the sisters."

Quentin smiled. His wife looked quickly up at him. "I am making no comparisons," said Quentin.

"Her pearls are beautiful, much handsomer than mine, John. He must be fond of her."

"She told me she is waiting to have thirty-two emeralds," said Gartha, "one of them to be set round with some diamonds. She wishes to make that sleepy lady who knits envious."

"She does not look like that," said Mrs. Quentin. "The little creature! Surely, if he gives her such lovely things, he must be fond of her."

"That shows how much you can believe of the stories you hear," said her husband. "They say she is simply like a daughter to him. The woman he adores lives up at the Maison Malafré."

"Chacun à son goût," said Gartha, and added after a moment: "She says she has an English friend. A young monsieur—a Sir with a mustache."

"Ah!" said Quentin, "an English friend. What is his name?"

"That she did not think to tell me," said Gartha.

"Her pearls are very beautiful," said Mrs. Quentin, with an uneasy feeling at her heart, "and she is very young. I know how little those children just out of the

convent understand of the wickedness of the world. We must have her over here often."

"To teach her some more of the world's wickedness," said Quentin, laughing.

"I believe you would laugh, John Quentin, if——"

At Mrs. Quentin's glance Gartha hastened to say, "Well, Alixe, I always called him so——"

"He must love the child very much to load her down with jewels like that. I hope they give her happiness."

"They do," said Gartha. "She said that if she only had something young about her she would be quite content."

"And how did you and your new friend amuse each other, Gartha?" asked Quentin in a pleasant tone.

"I told her something of our family history, me! We are very important people, and I thought it might interest her. First, I asked her if she had a child, and I told her that Alixe had none as yet."

Quentin turned away too angry to speak. When he could master his voice, he said: "Gartha, sometimes I really think God gave you less sense than other people. Will you never learn worldly wisdom? Will you never grow up?"

"Me! I am not yet ten," said Gartha. "They say that if you send me to boarding-school, I will learn fast enough. I heard the new maid telling Marie Monrouge of that."

"And what other pleasant truths did you amuse your new friend with?"

"I told her how I had hated my uncle Bruno and that he was a malefactor; that Mamasha called him that âme damnée."

"Couldn't you think of any other choice bits of information which would attract her toward the family?"

"The next time I am intending to give her the details," said Gartha. "We had not the time to-day."

CHAPTER VI.

HAMPTDON had been gone about a fortnight when the first instalment of Valencia's wardrobe arrived. Roxane, the blanchisseuse from beyond Chatillon, was the *dea ex machina* to accomplish this first delivery of goods. It was a cool brisk day in the beginning of September. With her great basket full of white clothes, Roxane drove over in her little cart with the washing for many of the families about. Over the door of her little house beyond Chatillon was the sign,

BLANCHISSEUSE À LA NOBLESSE,
ET LA HAUTE BOURGEOISIE.

Valencia in her room heard the signs of turmoil. She had been standing by her window, looking down the valley, thinking of the only living thing that she cared for, and that was the Honorable William Hamptdon. She did not care for him very much, but he was young and had been kind. Her gaze was fixed on the valley. The shadow of a cloud moved swift as a bird across the yellow fields. The grass was again tall and it bowed and waved before the wind which toyed wantonly with it, then straightened itself in indignation at such freedom from an outsider. The day was cool and sunlit. Valencia shaded her eyes with her hand. There in the distance arose the spire of the cathedral. Beneath, where her eyes could not penetrate, stood the Hôtel Trois Princes. She must make an excuse to go over there some day. She wondered if she would dare ask to see the rooms

where her friend had lodged. No, clearly, that would not do. One might with the higher class—they would not misunderstand. But with the people——

And just here the sound of loud argument reached her ear, followed by a thump upon the step of the escalier de service.

"I that have the whole work of the château on my shoulders, I that am obliged to wipe, and dust, and mend, and sweep, and help with the silver when there are guests. I who have lived with a Marquis, I that at present am aiding that lazy Aimée to bone the duck, which is not my business, du tout, du tout, I that——"

Valencia looked out into the corridor. A far door burst open and disclosed to her expectant gaze the figure of Radegonde, her eyes flashing fire, her tongue shooting sparks, her stride like that of a giant, dragging backward along the corridor toward the linen room a large basket, which scrapingly protested against following her; and the meek little old blanchisseuse, Roxane, followed the basket.

Roxane, upon seeing Madame la Comtesse looking out of her door, put her finger to her lip, and shook her head many times and very fast. Ah! Valencia knew what that meant. Something had come at last. She ran down the corridor and entered the tower room behind Roxane, and knowing Radegonde to the very core of her being, she said, "Come now, Radegonde, cease your clatter, and help Roxane to sort the clothes."

Radegonde sniffed. "As if I had nothing to do but to sort the clothes, Madame la Comtesse, I that have the dusting to do, the floors to sweep, the silver to aid about, when they have company, the ducks to bone, because in

my opinion the Countess Edmond will not cut out the bones for herself——"

"We care little for your opinion, Radegonde. Come and assist with the sorting."

Valencia took the list down from the nail and began to read it over. She was trembling in every limb. Had Roxane really brought anything for her? If not, why that shake of the head and why the finger on lip? It must be that something had come. When should she see it? Radegonde was curious to the point of dishonesty. If she caught the idea that Valencia wished to see Roxane alone, there was an end to all secrecy.

They counted over the clothes slowly, Radegonde finding fault with a button washed off here, or a bit of lace pulled away there. "I that have to mend all those," she said. "For it is I that do the dusting, and the sweeping, and the——"

"We can all repeat the list, Radegonde," said Valencia. "We should have poor memories else. Come! aid with the clothes, and then with the placing of them in the drawers."

"I that have the duck to bone, and all because the Countess Edmond— And what is this at the bottom? We had no parcel done up like that in a green paper. I have counted all the clothes, not one is missing, except it be that chemise of the old Count that I saw upon your mari when I went to mass last Sunday morning, Roxane. How many were there, four or five? Ah, that is right, five, but you would have had time to wash the chemise and bring it back to-day, Friday, clean and starched. I cannot wait here. What is that parcel, Roxane? I that have the duck to——"

"That belongs to someone else," said the little Roxane, suddenly developing some fire. "Please leave it alone."

"And you have not the time to place the things in the drawers, Radegonde?" said Valencia, with a deep sigh. "Do not go back to that duck. Why cannot Aimée bone the duck——"

"Is that all?" questioned Radegonde.

"C'est tout," Roxane had replied.

"Cette Aimée, la! she is too much of a cor-r-r-r-r-don bleu to bone the duck! O mon Dieu! but a co-r-r-r-r-don bleu. When I lived with the Marquis—but I must go," and Radegonde, feeling that she was needed here, departed at once with the stride of a grenadier, and thumped her way down the back stairs, scolding as she went.

Valencia peeped out into the hall. She knew with certainty where the Countess Edmond and her husband could be found. They were never anywhere else. Then she tiptoed along the corridor to the room of the Count. The door was slightly ajar. She pushed it a little wider, and to her dismay the old voice of her husband exclaimed, "Entrez! Ah, it is thou, petite. Entrez, I beg of thee."

Here was a dilemma for which Valencia had not prepared herself.

"I—only came to see—to see—if Roxane—is here, Aristodème." She stood at the door, peering timidly in. "And she, Radegonde, has accused her of not bringing all of the chemises. Did you have five, Aristodème, or six?"

"Five, exactly five. But entrez! Mon enfant, entrez donc!"

He advanced and drew her within the room and across to the table by the window. He had in his hand a small old-fashioned painting of a rather pretty woman.

He seated himself again, drawing Valencia near him.

"She was like that," he said, "in her youth. Hast thou ever seen such beauty, such grace? The poise of the head, the sweep of the hair, the small curls round the forehead."

"Did she live in the time of the Empress Josephine?" asked Valencia, knowing perfectly of whom the picture was the counterfeit presentment.

"If she lived in the time of the Empress of the French! Child! What art thou talking of? She is alive to-day. It is my friend on the hillside, Madame Malafré."

"She was pretty in those days," said Valencia, keeping up the reputation of her sex and bending over the portrait.

"Alas, yes," said the Count. "And thou, my child, where dost thou keep thyself?" He turned upon her a gaze of appreciation. "I do not see thee often; I wish thou camest here oftener. Come! Sit on my knee, petite. Has it ever occurred to thee that thou art my wife, that we are married, that this is thy place by right, that on my breast shouldst thou pour out thy griefs?"

"I have no griefs," said Valencia, drawing away. "Hark, Aristodème, do I not hear the voice of Madame Malafré?"

The Count arose hastily.

"C'est possible," he said, "c'est possible. Go, then, va-t'en. I will myself go down to meet her."

Valencia sped to her own chamber and locked the door, behind which she found the patient Roxane waiting.

"And now my parcel, Roxane."

Roxane had laid the package on the bed. Valencia flew to it, and began to tear off the papers. "There is another," said Roxane, "down in the cart. I did not dare to bring them both up at once. I will go down, and if Radegonde questions, I will say that it is the missing shirt." But Radegonde was too much occupied with the boning of her duck and her reminiscences of the Marquis to question Roxane, and the little old blanchisseuse arrived at Valencia's door a second time, breathless but successful.

"You will come again on Monday for the house linen," said Valencia, "and then I shall give you two francs for your trouble, Roxane, and if you keep my secret well, another with the next parcel that comes. I have no change by me at present. I wish to astonish them all, when I wear the Paris clothes; for that reason have I asked you to keep silence."

"I understand, Madame la Comtesse. Bonjour, Madame la Comtesse," and Roxane went quickly out of the door.

Again it was locked and the girl was alone with her precious possessions. She heard Count Aristodème calling: "Valencie, Valencie, come again, little one. It is not Madame Malafré. She is not here," but the door was not opened; she was to have a half-hour alone with her treasures. The papers were finally torn, twitched, pulled away, thrown upon the floor in wild confusion, and two lovely gowns lay revealed. Which! Which! Which! The blue, the white! The white, the blue! If

the blue was covered with embroidery, and was completely lined with a slip of blue silk, the white muslin was like a cobweb and ruffled to the waist. If the white had a sash of cerise, and a knot of the same on the shoulder, the blue had also a belt, and a sash of pale blue ribbon, and little knots on the body. Oh, they were both adorable. Were there pockets? Yes. She felt for and found the pocket in the blue skirt, and thrust her hand deep, deep down. Ah! Something hard! A little box! These then were the rings! She drew out the box and tore it open with flushed cheeks and eager fingers. Something rattled. The cover was off in a moment. Six rings of different sorts came into view. They were not emeralds, not the thirty-two emeralds for which she had hoped, that were to make Phigie envious. Well, after all, these were far prettier. The little ruby, the small diamond, the tiny pearl, the band like a snake with turquoises for eyes, the other two with some small jewels dangling therefrom. "Ah, Beel, dear Beel," she murmured, "what a good creature you are!" And if this pocket was filled with joy unspeakable, why should not there be a parcel of bliss untold in the pocket of the white muslin? Yes, yes! Another box! This did not rattle. A red plush case kept its treasure intact. The spring was pushed back, a small watch with a tiny enamelled angel on the one side and a wreath of forget-me-nots on the other, caused Valencia almost to scream with delight. There was a hook and a catch, and she hung the watch on the bosom of her dress, put the rings upon her fingers, and sat down before the glass to admire herself. But if she could adorn herself with the jewels, why not with the gowns? Swift as thought the old brown linen was

thrown off, and she had the white muslin skirt over her head. The waist fitted to a charm, the skirt was just a trifle long; that could be remedied. Then the white must come off and the blue go on, and thus Valencia spent the morning arraying herself in one dress, then the other, creasing them more than several days of ordinarily careful wearing would have done. Hark! What was that? Radegonde knocking at the door. "Le déjeuner est servi, Madame." She must dress herself in the old brown linen again, and descend, a veritable Cinderella.

The rings and the watch were pushed back in company with the wedding-ring behind the soap-box cover. The dresses were carefully folded and laid in the long old-fashioned drawer, the drawer locked, and Valencia appeared at the table with a bright flush on her cheeks, and a shining of the eye, that none of them had ever seen before. As she came in, Count Aristodème was saying, "And when do you go, ma sœur?"

"I leave on the coming Wednesday, frère aîné. Alceste, du sucre."

"Ah, du sucre, Madame c'est çà!"

"The fashions will be quite decided by the coming Wednesday, and I must have a few things if we are to remain here this winter. In fact I sometimes think that I may not return."

Valencia looked in astonishment at Iphigénie. She had never heard her say so many consecutive words. There is no height which the feminine organ of speech will not attempt through the medium of clothes.

"And I, my heart?" It was the Count Edmond who spoke.

"Hast not thou thy orange-colored handkerchief?" smiled Phigie.

"That is cruel, my soul. I do not always sleep."

"Nearly always," smiled Iphigénie, and helped herself to a chocolate. The chocolates came down every week from Meunier.

"If thou art not back in two weeks, I shall come to fetch thee," said her husband. At this unusual burst from Count Edmond, Valencia looked up interested. They were both appearing in a new light.

"It will be dull without thee, Phigie," said Valencia. "I should love to think that thou wert always there, knitting, knitting. Sometimes I have thought it wearisome, but now that thou art going, I shall wish thou wert there, knitting, knitting, knitting. It is like eternity, that knitting."

"And what of me?" said Count Edmond.

"The orange handkerchief, frère aîné," said Valencia, laughing. If Aristodème were Iphigénie's elder brother, was not Edmond hers?

"Shalt thou see any of our friends in Paris, Phigie?" asked Valencia.

"Any of our friends?" drawled her sister-in-law, sweetly. "I shall see all our friends. Thou must write them, Edmond, to come and see me. Of whom art thou thinking, Valonthia? Thou and I know few of the same people. Alceste, du sucre."

"Du sucre, Madame la Comtesse, voici!"

"I was thinking of the Honorable William Hamptdon, Phigie. Wilt thou see him?"

"Ze 'onorab' Veeliam 'Amp'done will have go home to Angland before this," said Count Aristodème. "Il prend le channel-boat. 'E will not be there."

"His beau-frère is chargé in Paris."

"That will not keep him. Ils aiment leur climat, those Anglish. Il aime hees fogs and hees meests."

"Phigie, écoutez! If thou dost see the Honorable William Hamptdon, wilt thou give him a message from me?"

"Certainement, Valonthia, if Aristodème allow."

"And why not?" said Count Aristodème, kindly. "The child is married. The message will be before us all."

"Merci bien, Aristodème! Tell him, Phigie, when thou seest him, that the winter will be a cold one."

"And art thou a prophet of the weather, child? And why does he care to know that? Ze 'onorab' Veeliam 'Amp'done?"

"He asked me if our winters are cold. The peasants remark that it will be a bad season; all the signs say so. Wilt thou tell him?"

"Certainement, Valonthia, if I see him, but I shall not see him."

"I read in a book once that the good God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," thought Valencia. "He knows that I cannot wear those thin muslins in the winter time," but to this reflection she did not give voice.

"I am invited to spend Sunday with the Quentin," she said, aloud, as she arose from the table.

"When wert thou asked, petite?"

"You told me yourself, Aristodème."

"Yes, I remember, c'est vrai, pour le déjeuner, n'est-ce pas?"

"Yes, they breakfast earlier than we at Salvaresse—at eleven and a half o'clock. Will you send me with the carriage, Aristodème?"

"Canst thou not walk, Valencie? Alceste, as thou knowest, must set the table, and wait on the table, and——"

"Then Radegonde may drive me, or old Félix. I will not walk when I go to pay a visit of distinction."

"The child is right," said Edmond. "For the credit of the family, she must drive."

"We shall have that trumpeter, Radegonde, at breakfast," said Count Aristodème.

"For me," drawled Countess Edmond, "I will remain in bed."

"That will be best, Phigie; but go I must, and drive I must, me! Remember, Aristodème, the carriage at eleven o'clock on Sunday."

Count Aristodème bowed resignedly.

At eleven o'clock on the following Sunday morning Valencia drove up in all the state that she could summon to the Abbey gate.

"I hope thou wilt appear well underneath, Valonthia, for the credit of the family. Thou could'st have had anything of mine," said Iphigénie.

"Merci! belle-sœur. I am looking very well, for me. My dress is clean. This old cloak covers me well from dust. Good-by," and Valencia ran down to the back door. As soon as she was well out of sight of the house, she took from her pocket a parcel, and opened it. From the parcel she took the watch and the rings. The watch she pinned upon the left side of her gown, a gown that showed a great many ruffles of blue and much embroidery when the old brown cloak flew back. Upon her fingers she placed the six rings. She tried them in

various ways. Three on one hand, three on the other. All six on one hand. Four on the left, and two on the right. Sometimes the rubies next the diamonds, sometimes next the pearl. She had brought the discarded wedding-ring to swell the numbers; besides which, it looked well for a married woman to wear a wedding-ring when she went visiting. No one seemed to think it strange that she was going to breakfast with Gartha Valery. It was as if one young girl had asked another young girl a little older, to come and spend the day with her. No one complained that the family were not included, or that the husband had been left alone at home —he, least of all. Would it not leave him a long day with his friend on the hill, who had become so exigeante of late? As for the Countess Edmond, she needed a rest before the fatigue of telling Radegonde where to pack her clothes, and Count Edmond—he could not sleep as well in company as at home. At the château he knew quite well what they would say. It was always the same, but in company they were constantly starting some new thought or idea, which kept one nervous. At such times he was ever waking partly, and saying, "Hein, what is that?" which made him wish himself at Salvaresse, in which wish most of the company concurred.

When Valencia reached the gate in the wall and had sent Alceste away, she was ushered inside, and walked across a wide terrace to the salon. Here she dropped her cloak, and entered to find Mrs. Quentin in a plain white gown, with, however, innumerable little frills of lace about her lovely shoulders, and Gartha wearing a white muslin, very simply made. Valencia did not feel at all ill at ease on these accounts, knowing, as she did,

the secrets of her armoire. She was their guest. She could not have appeared in the brown linen, the blue cotton, or the faded pink lawn. The pink lawn had a very bad tear in the side breadth, and, besides, they were all too short now. The skirts were worn very long this year; you almost stepped on them in front, and she was to spend the whole long day. Probably they would have some guests for feefe o'clock, and then she would be properly dressed to meet them. Her great strands of pearls were clasped round her neck, and swayed as she walked. Her watch was on her breast, her six pretty rings and the ugly one, for propriety, were on her fingers—and she felt for the first time, since she had been old enough to think of such matters, perfectly satisfied with herself.

Mrs. Quentin and Gartha kissed her, and then Gartha carried her off to see the various points of interest.

When breakfast was announced, Valencia was led by Mr. Quentin to a place upon his right. It was a soft warm day, one of the last when they would be able to breakfast out-of-doors, and the long table was set as usual within the alcove on the terrace. Valencia could not subdue a little feeling of gratified pride, as she looked down the long expanse of silver and crystal, and noticed the various guests, some much older than she; and she, a girl of seventeen, honored with a seat at the right of the host. She had never been made so much of before—or, well, not since the Bordighera days.

Upon the right of the Mrs. Quentin, as she persisted in calling herself—though Gartha had told Valencia that she was a duchess by right—sat a small dark man, the perfect picture of the jeunesse dorée of the present day. His eyes were very black, his eyelashes long and curling;

his cheeks, showing a good coat of tan, had yet some color. His mustache was very dark, and well waxed. His hands were well kept—the nails long and highly polished, the fingers loaded with many handsome rings. His sleeve-links were large and glittering, and his watch-chain rivalled that of Gartha's father, Mr. Valery, who sat across from him. They called him Marquis. He did not seem so young as Hamptdon—hardly so young as Mr. Quentin.

"My father brought him home," said Gartha, later. "He is an undoubted vaurien."

"Why?" said Valencia. "I thought him a handsome man, though old."

"He is a vaurien all the same. He is a marquis; can you ask more? All the nobility are vaurien. That has been my experience."

"Your aunt is a duchess."

"But not a professing duchess," said Gartha. "She loves to be plain Mrs. Quentin. When Valery heard her say, 'Oh, no, I am only plain Mrs. Quentin,' he said, 'Alixe, you could never be plain anything.' Do you not admire my father's clothes?"

"They are very striking," said Valencia, politely.

"They have been discussing you, and someone said: 'Is that the little Cinderella you were telling me of? Look at her! She is a little queen. They cannot treat her so badly là-bas.'"

"Do I look like a Cinderella?" asked Valencia, half laughing, but with heightened color. "Who could have prettier things than I? Handsomer jewels? I do not say this to boast. It is because they gossip about me—about my husband. He is very kind. He has never said a harsh word to me."

"Madame la Comtesse, may I present my friend, the Marquis de Vallée?"

Valencia bowed to the stranger, who bent low before her. He clicked his heels behind him in military fashion, and looked long into her lovely eyes with his bold black ones.

"You should not have done that," said Mrs. Quentin to Valery, who was her brother-in-law. "The child is too young for such bold admiration. She will get enough and to spare, but, pray God, she may be a little older first."

"If the truth were told, she doesn't get any too much of it at home," answered Valery.

"She denies that," said Mrs. Quentin. "She tells Gartha that they are very kind to her. One has only to look at her lovely clothes and those wonderful pearls to see that she is loaded down with kindness. I thought the gown a little dressy for our Sunday breakfast, but the child has no one to tell her, and undoubtedly she wishes to do her husband credit."

"I thought the old villain was on the verge of bankruptcy," said Valery. "He must have mortgaged all his lands and household goods to be able to give her a thing like that necklace. But how out of place, Alixe!"

"The child does not know. She wears them all the time, Gartha says, early and late, working in her garden, and walking over the hills."

"She ought to be warned," said Valery. "Some day, some villain who has heard of their value will steal them off her pretty throat, and there will be another fortune gone to the dogs."

"Gartha," whispered Alixe. "I want you to take Ma-

dame d'Alêne down to see the mill. I am sure she will enjoy a visit to Mère Monrouge. But, first, I had better lend her a gown until she wishes to dress for afternoon tea, and she had better leave her pearls in my room."

Gartha put her arm through that of her friend, and drew her away from her new admirer.

When she was gone, he turned to Valery.

"D'Alêne, did you say? The d'Alênes of Salvaresse? Ah! indeed! a charming creature. She must be some sort of cousin of mine; my mother was a d'Alêne."

When Valencia and Gartha returned from the mill, and their romp in the hay, the Marquis was gone, and Valencia, after removing the muslin which Mrs. Quentin had lent her in place of her own and inducting herself again in the charming blue creation—after restoring the pearls to her neck and putting her rings on her fingers—came downstairs to join the assembled company at afternoon tea. Here it was all open and above-board. At home every movement had to be surrounded with so much secrecy, but "Who makes the secrets?" she said aloud, and answered herself, "I am afraid I make them myself."

When she arrived at home after a long, delightful day, there was no one to greet her but Count Aristodème. As she drew up she caught sight of someone in her room. Could it be Madame Malafré? But no; there was no further evidence of her presence. Besides, she could find nothing even if she searched for hours. "Because I wear them all," whispered Valencia in her own ear.

Phigie, her husband said, had developed a headache, and had remained in bed all day, and Edmond had sat by her side.

"With his head against the wall and the orange-colored handkerchief over it," laughed Valencia. "I can see him. Do I look nice, Aristodème?" She felt so happy. Why not speak kindly to Aristodème?

"Charmante, petite! Why dost thou appear so much better to-day than ever before, Valencia? Never since our wedding-day hast thou looked as lovely as now. I have thought it was only the beauté du diable; I see now that thou wilt be a lovely woman."

Valencia could have told him that even youth and beauty need a charming background, but she only laughed and said: "I am growing up, Aristodème. I was not quite grown when my uncle came and got me for you."

"Ah, my child," said the little man, looking wistfully at her, "I am afraid it is the young society that thou shouldst have. We are old people, all of us here. Even Madame Malafré is growing older."

"Yes," said Valencia, "and so am I. Gartha Valery was there. She speaks the argot of the quarter—otherwise she is charming, and, oh! she is young!"

She was intoxicated with her pleasure. It was the first happy day that she had had for so long a time. She ran up to the little man, and, bending slightly, kissed him on the forehead.

He caught her hand. "Thou art a good child," he said. "Thou shouldst have been my daughter instead of my wife."

"In that case I should have been a little poorer than I am, Aristodème. You had better not quarrel with my bread and butter. You have told me that I have that much."

Then she ran upstairs and stopped at Phigie's door. A faint, though placid, "Entrez!" responded to her knock. Valencia went into the darkened room, holding her cloak well about her. Phigie was better, and was sitting up in bed eating some chocolates which Madame Malafré had brought her.

"When was she here?" asked Valencia.

"An hour ago. She left me a little while before the carriage drove up."

"She could find nothing in my room, not even the wedding-ring, and I carried the key of the armoire," mused Valencia.

When she went to her room she stood for some time looking at herself in the mirror. Then she slowly took off the pearls, and began to remove the few pins that were in the belt of her dress. Then her hand went into her pocket to search for her handkerchief. She did not find it, but, instead, a small bit of paper. This she had overlooked when she examined the pockets on that first day. She opened it slowly. It was a little scrap, such as is used in shops for accounts or bills of sales, and she was about to throw it away, when a small word in writing caught her eye. It was her own name. Quickly she held it to the light. There were only a few words traced upon it. First came the date and address, then these words:

"LONCI:

"I hope they are what you wanted. I have broken into three of the pearls. If you need anything more send to this address at once; I leave for London by the last of September. I could not buy the emeralds this time, but you will get them some day. My sister

chose the dresses. She knows all about you. If you wish to come to her in the winter for a while, she will be glad to have you." And then, this very prosaic note ended with the words, "God bless you, Lonci."

"Dear old Beel," she said, as she tore the paper into little bits, and then remembered too late that she had destroyed the date and the Honorable Mrs. Valliant's address with it. This sobered her somewhat, but, after all, her day had been too dear, too delightful, to worry about anything. It would last her for a long time. She wondered if Aristodème would ask Gartha Valery back again. It was all so fine at the Abbey! Much finer than here. She had heard Aristodème say that when they were robber knights, the d'Alêne, they used to harass the Abbey. He even had a spoon and knife that were taken from the Abbey in the old days. She had heard Mr. Quentin laugh about it. Well, no matter, that would not destroy her friendship with these charming people; nothing in the wide world should come between them, and she fell asleep and awoke again restlessly, calling out, "Gartha, Gartha, I am behind the hay over in this corner."

The days passed. Phigie went to Paris. Frère Edmond sat against the wall and wept patient tears underneath the orange-colored handkerchief. Valencia saw them rolling down his coat.

"Edmond," she said one day, laughing a little, for no troubles are serious to youth but its own, "will it do if I sit here and click two pieces of wood together like Phigie's needles? To be sure, I cannot knit, me! I cannot do anything, but I may put you to sleep, and that is what you need, God knows."

"You are very kind—you may try it, Valencia," said the miserable Count Edmond.

Valencia ran to Félix. "Give me quickly two small bits of hard wood," she said. "If frère aîné does not sleep, it will be my death." She returned to try her experiment. She seated herself in as soft a frame of mind as she could muster, and clicked away with the bits of wood. She even munched some chocolates to carry out the deception. At first the mild noise seemed to soothe Count Edmond, and he dropped off asleep, for he had not slept for many days, but he awakened almost at once, in a fright, calling, "Where is Phigie? She is not here," and again the tears rolled down over his waistcoat.

"He should go to Paris," said Valencia to her husband. "I should love to go with him, me! To be sure, she will not want him, and when one is trying on dresses one cannot knit, but to be with her will soothe him. He had better go."

So it came about that the Count came down one morning with fifty francs in his hand. "Edmond," he said, "mon frère, thy soul is in Paris. Go and find it; the train goes within the hour."

Valencia quickly packed his bag, the carriage came to the door, and Count Edmond drove down the hill and along the road to d'Arcy-Renaud. When he came to the point of rocks he waved his orange-colored handkerchief over his head vigorously, and that was the last they saw of him.

"It is quiet. Just you and me, Aristodème," said Valencia.

"The bills will be less," returned her husband.

"Much less, indeed. I who eat little sugar, and you who eat the cereals."

Radegonde was relieved from the stuffing of boned duck, Alceste was not called upon to go in to d'Arcy-Renaud for zephyr, there were not so many ruffled skirts to send to Roxane—and, altogether, the change was an improvement, as to the purse of the old Count.

CHAPTER VII

"I HAVE a cousin coming to stay with me, Valencia," said her husband one morning when they were taking their coffee together.

"A cousin?" said Valencia, with little interest. "He will be old, I suppose." She was waiting for him to finish his coffee and rice, that she might run up and look at the late dahlias, and see if the frost had nipped them.

"He will be here to-morrow. He comes for the hunting."

"There is not much hunting now," said Valencia. "All the families have gone to Paris." She sighed, shook her head, and sighed again. Even the convent days took on a roseate hue. They had been passed in Paris.

When her husband had finished, she left him alone and ran up to the garden. "Another old person," she said. "O dear God, if there were but something young in the world. Sometimes there are four old ones here, sometimes three. Now there will be three."

Madame Malafré was a very constant visitor. She felt it necessary more than ever to keep her eye on the Count and his young wife, now that they had no other chaperon.

It was one day when she had driven to Chatillon to make fresh complaint about the cereals, and had taken Alceste, thereby causing Radegonde to wait at the table and upset her husband's equanimity, that she had come

in late and had found a surprise in store for her. Count Aristodème was seated at breakfast, and upon his right sat the small, dark, handsome gentleman whom she had seen at the Abbey on that dear, delightful day. She had hardly thought of him again, but she remembered him the moment she saw him.

He arose with an exaggerated show of courtesy, and bent over her hand. "And so we meet again, my goddess!" The last word was said very low; it might have been mistaken for countess, for the Count did not hear well.

"This is my cousin, the Marquis, of whom I have spoken, Valencie," he said. "Where didst thou meet, and when?"

"I met the Marquis at the Abbey when I went to breakfast."

"And did not speak of it?"

"I forgot all about it. I did not hear his name."

"A compliment, cousin, as you will say. One meets a young goddess, thinks of nothing but her for a month, and when he meets her again he finds that she has entirely forgotten him."

He spoke very fast and very low.

"Hein?" said the Count.

"He complains, the Marquis, that I do not remember him, Aristodème, but how can I remember all that I meet in this gay life of ours?" She shrugged her shoulders, tossed back her hair, and laughed gayly.

She noticed that the Marquis was dressed in the very height of fashion; that he wore riding-clothes, and that he had a hunting-dog at his feet, to whom he spoke often in a tone of command. Everything that he had or men-

tioned was English—his 'unter, his 'unting-dogue, his drague, his cosheman, his groome, and his talk was principally of rideeng to 'ounds."

"You will find it stupid here," said Valencia. "There is nothing young about the place."

"I do not think I shall find it stupid."

Valencia had interrupted a lecture on cereals, which was continued after a moment. "Ecoutez! Veelie," continued the Count. "When we knew nothing of microbes or bacilli, we were well—this you grant me, non? But, when we have learned about microbes and what diseases they bring, we take those diseases, and all that we can do is to avoid them. We drink little water here at Salvaresse; our well is twenty metres deep, but all that we have is boiled."

"The question is," said the Marquis, "whether it is better to drink them—those microbes—dead or alive." He laughed.

"My dear sir, my dear Veelie, you frighten me; oh, but frighten me, Veelie. One does not know where to turn."

"There is such a thing as knowing too much," said the Marquis, laughing again at the old man's discomfiture.

"We will go up to Valencie's garden," said the Count. "That is a charming place to take the coffee, and then I may go on a little higher after I have rested. Valencie," said the Count, aside, "what have we for dinner? I may ask our friend, Madame Malafré, to dine this evening. That will make a very charming partie carrée."

"It will certainly be a partie carrée," assented Va-

lencia, excluding the Count's adjective. "We have a roast fowl, Aristodème, and a réchauffé."

"Is it good enough for our friend?" asked her husband, anxiously.

"If it is good enough for the Marquis, I think it is good enough for Madame Malafré," said Valencia. "We could add something."

"Add what thou wilt, Valencie, what thou wilt," said the Count, loftily, in a tone which caused Valencia to open her eyes. He whispered in her ear later: "He is very rich, Valencie; he will not remain unless I allow him to contribute. Order what thou wilt, and of the best."

The days seemed gayer now. The Marquis played at hunting, but he was seldom long away from the château. He brought life and spirit into the house, and though not so young as Valencia, still he was very much younger than Count Aristodème, and his gay presence caused everyone to feel more cheerful. He had two good horses, besides one for his groom, stabled in the old stalls of Salvaresse—stalls cut in the rock, where the robber knights had stabled their dashing chargers.

One day Valencia broke in upon a conversation which was to prove of great interest to her.

"She has no habit," said Count Aristodème, contendingly.

"Anything will do—any skirt, whether faded or old, and the little cotton waists that she wears will serve very well. People are most of them back in Paris now, and anything will do for the country," was the answer of the Marquis.

"We are talking of thee, petite," said the Count.

"Veelie wishes thou shouldst learn to ride with him. He says it is lonely to ride alone, and I, as thou knowest, have not mounted a horse these many years. What sayest thou; wilt thou learn to ride?"

Valencia's eyes danced; her color came and went. Could any suggestion be more delightful? The Marquis looked at her and sighed. He had looked at many and sighed in the last fifteen years.

"I should like it above everything," she said. "Come, let us go now."

They laughed at her impetuosity.

"Thou hast no habit, petite," said the Count.

"I tell him any skirt will do," said the Marquis. "Have you no old frock?"

"Several," said Valencia, laughing at the truth of her words. "That is exactly what I have got, me! Wait! I will get one."

She ran up the stairs, took the old checked skirt from her closet, and brought it down. "There," she said, "will that be of service?"

"The very thing," said the Marquis, approvingly. "The very thing."

"I have outgrown it; it is too short."

"So much the better. Can you wear it?"

"I am thinner than I was at the convent."

"C'est alright," said the Marquis. "C'est épatent, c'est trés smart, trés smart."

"What is that?" asked the Count.

"That is some Anglish word," said the Marquis, laughing jovially. "I speak the Anglish vera vell. Ve vill always speak ze Anglish, ma cousine, ven ve go on 'orse-back rideeng."

Valencia laughed. She did not know when she had been so happy.

"I will run," she said, "and change my dress, and then I may take my first lesson. Not?"

"Ze feerst lessone," said the Marquis, "ze feerst lessone, you unerstan', cousin, heh?" He turned to the Count as he spoke.

Count Aristodème shook his head. "No," he said, in French as usual, "my English was forgotten long ago. A few words to bring in occasionally I know, and that is all."

When Valencia appeared again, the horses were at the door, and the old checked skirt served every purpose. The groom led the small horse on which Valencia sat, awkward and a little frightened.

"But a lady's saddle," said Count Aristodème, "a lady's saddle. How did you happen to have that?"

"It is one that was among the harnesses," said the Marquis. "Gaston happened to bring it."

"That liar," said Radegonde, looking between the bars of the kitchen-window at the first lesson. "It was his wife's. He has her put away somewhere; I have not told it to my master yet, but when——"

"How dost thou know so much, good-for-nothing?" Aimée, who was peeling the onions for the stew, flung these words over her shoulder.

"I, that lived with them in the Rue Vasintone—to think I do not know. That was sixteen years ago, before I came here to these." She indicated the Count, Valencia, and the château with a wave of the hand. "She was forced to a Maison de Santé. It was his behavior. I do not say that he was worse than others.

The nobility are all mad. They have no morals. There was another lady. I saw them once on Sunday driving in to the Café Madrid. She was very beautiful. The poor Marquise had nothing but the money—no beauty. She loved him to distraction. She was jealous; she made her will in his favor, they say. Now he is free, at least to enjoy himself; he cannot marry until she dies. If he could he would hasten that end. I have heard that that other lady was a singer in a café chantant; she has married an English milor. He does not look heart-broken; he will survive, it seems."

When Valencia had cantered down the road a little way, with Gaston running beside the horse and the Marquis at the bridle rein, Count Aristodème's conscience began to prick him. He put on his broad-brimmed alpaca hat, made in Germany and lined with green, and went up the hill to see his friend, Madame Malafré. When she heard that he was awaiting her below, she summoned Thalie to her room. The mice were taken from the cushion, her hands and face were wiped with a damp towel, a modicum of rouge was rubbed on the withered cheeks, a great deal of powder overlaid the yellow face, the pillows were turned and beaten, the window was opened a little way, patchouly was sprinkled about the room, a duvet thrown over her day clothes, and the Count was admitted.

Madame Malafré sat up in bed. She fancied that she looked very seductive lying back upon the pillows. She drew the bed-curtain a little, that the glare of day might not tell the truth too unkindly, and said, "Well, my friend, what news have you for me?"

Count Aristodème advanced into the room, bent over

the lady's hand, and kissed it. Then, listening until he heard Thalie descending the stairs, imprinted a second chaste, though hasty, kiss upon her brow.

"I have come to ask thy advice, my heart."

"I would ever be thy counsellor, my friend."

"Thou rememberest what thou hast told me of the parting of my wife"—Madame Malafré always winced at the sound of these words—"with the young Englishman who was here, the Sir 'Amp'done? I taxed my wife with it, and she confessed it to me. She said that she had sighed for something young. Thou and I, petite, are no longer young. She had known him in youth. We have known each other in youth, Thérèse."

Madame shifted her position a little. Such home truths were not pleasant.

"We shall never grow younger, it is true, mon ami, but still I am younger than thou art, and always will be."

"That is quite true," acquiesced Count Aristodème, remembering that he had the advantage of Madame Malafré by exactly one month.

"I have been thinking, Thérèse, that, though the Marquis is not very young—say forty-five at the utmost—still he is young enough to give my wife much pleasure. Not that I would deprive the child of happiness, God knows, but she may grow to take too much pleasure in his being here. Have I ever told thee his story, Thérèse?"

Madame Malafré shook her head, wondering what was coming.

"He was a poor young man, the son of an impoverished nobleman. A marriage was arranged between himself and a young girl of good family, who, however,

had even more money than family. While they were engaged he fell desperately in love, or thought he had, with a girl who sang at the cafés chantants. Of course, it was absurd in every way. He lavished all he had upon her. The affaire did not end with his marriage. His wife became strange, then insane. The story is that she saw them together one day in a café near Paris. She went home, and tried to drown herself in her bath. She was taken away to a Maison de Santé. She had made her will in his favor. That cannot be upset now, for she is not sane enough to sign again. It would not be legal. The first will is legal. Her relatives are beside themselves. When he came to me, first writing, saying how sad his life was, I could not dream of refusing him a little visit at Salvaresse, but now it seems to me that I may have done wrong. The lady he loved has married, but his wife is still alive, and ill—always ill. If that wife were to die, and I were to die, there would seem to be an excellent solution of the difficulty. They get along excellently well together."

Madame Malafré pressed the plump little hand with her beringed one. "Thou shalt not die, mon ami," she said, and muttered between her lips, "rather she."

"What I have come to ask is this, Thérèse. While Phigie is away, the poor little thing down there has no chaperon. Wilt thou come down and remain for a time, or until Veelie goes?"

Any other woman would have smiled outright at the Count's words. No chaperon! His wife without a chaperon! but Madame Malafré knew when to take advantages of circumstances that came to her ready made. She said: "I will come with pleasure; it will be an agree-

able change for me. Mind, mon ami, I do not say there is any harm in their being together, these two. They are protected on all sides. He is married, and those in the Maison de Santé live a long time. She is married also. It is just a pleasant friendship; still, for the sake of the world, perhaps it is better that I come down."

Did Madame Malafré hope that there might be danger? She appeared that day at dinner, and Valencia found that she had established herself at Count Aristodème's request in the second spare chamber.

The days went by now in charming sequence to Valencia. If the Marquis were too demonstrative at times, Valencia checked him by a look, and then he became humble and submissive, and begged her pardon most effusively. Once, when he was helping her to mount, he bent and kissed her instep. She drew her foot away so roughly as to scratch his face. The scratch Count Aristodème noticed later. "It is nothing," said the Marquis; "such wounds are dear to me," and he looked straight into the eyes of Valencia.

Madame Malafré's position was a difficult one. She was there as chaperon; at the same time it was for her interest to belittle Valencia in the eyes of the Count, her husband—undo her, if possible. She threw the two together, the Marquis and Valencia, as much as in her power lay. She felt that if once Count Aristodème should find Valencia unworthy, the game would be in her own hands. Those pearls, too, were worth any amount of scheming for. She knew their value, though Aristodème would not believe her. She had not seen them of late. She wondered where Valencia kept them. She wondered about many things. She wondered how

Valencia had managed to make so great a change in her style of dress. Her clothes now all had a Paris cut, and seemed Paris-made. The materials were something new and modern. They far eclipsed her own, or even those of the Countess Edmond. When she questioned the Count, he said: "Oh, I do not know. I heard Iphigénie offering her anything of hers. Probably she has made some of those old ones over." Madame Malafré had to be content with this.

The rides continued, and grew longer each day. Valencia made no secret of her pleasure. It was a revelation to her. Still, she always felt a slight uneasiness when alone with the Marquis, and insisted that she would not ride unless the groom, Gaston, followed at a respectful distance. Count Aristodème agreed with this, and the Marquis was forced to submit.

The third day after Madame Malafré took up her residence at the château was the fête day of the Count. Valencia took pains to see that the table looked its prettiest. All the autumn flowers of her garden were culled, the table-linen was of the finest, though darned in many places by Radegonde; the silver was bright, as only old silver can be made, the glass shone irreproachable. Alceste waited in his best form, though more decrepit than of old. All were en grande tenue. The Marquis and the Count en frac, as for all dinners, but there was an added something to each costume that made the feast seem more imposing than usual.

Madame Malafré sent up to the house on the hill for a dinner dress all bugles, jets, and laces, and Valencia donned the charming white muslin, ruffled to the waist, with the cerise ceinture and the shoulder-knot of the

same. When she was dressed she stood looking at herself in the mirror. "Shall I? Shall I not?" were the questions that she asked herself. Her indecision was finally brought to an end by her going to the closet and taking from the little shelf near the floor a stout pair of country-made shoes. She flashed a look in the direction of the second guest-chamber. "O hé, Madame!" she sang in a high key, "you would never think of looking there." It had never occurred to her that Madame Malafré cared to do more than hold the pearls in her hands. This she was determined should not happen. She would certainly know in that case something about the value of the necklace. She would tell Aristodème. It would cause any amount of bother, and perhaps Aristodème would take her pearls away, and lock them up. He had the right certainly, but Madame Malafré should not bring them to his notice, if she, Valencia, could help it; however, the pleasure of wearing them, of enhancing her appearance that evening, she could not resist.

The Marquis could hardly keep his eyes off the young girl during dinner. She sat near him, he upon her right —Madame Malafré opposite him and on the right of the Count. A stranger looking in upon them would have said, "What a charming partie carrée," and yet not one of them was wholly content with his or her lot in life.

Valencia saw that the Marquis scrutinized the pearls with critical eye. Once he was about to speak, but she half closed her eyes at him, shaking her head almost imperceptibly. Delighted to be taken into her confiddence, if ever so slightly, in this secret way, he waited until the dinner was over, and then begged leave to smoke a pipe, which he assured Madame Malafré was

entirely English. Valencia remained with him at the table, while the Count and Madame Malafré retired to the adjoining library. The Marquis could hardly contain himself until they were alone.

"What a splendid necklace!" he said. "I had no idea that the Count possessed any family jewels. I thought that the old Count, his father, had parted with them long ago, as my father parted with our possessions."

"Aristodème did not give me these, cousin," said Valencia. "They were left me by my own father."

"Vraiment! petite. Do you know I should have said that your song would have been that homely old English one, 'My face is my fortune'? Fortune enough for any man," he added, gazing into her eyes.

Valencia drew back. "Don't, cousin," she said, "you make me uncomfortable. I should like to tell you about the pearls, and ask your advice. I wonder what I should do about them. Aristodème is very near-sighted. He has apparently never seen them. He still thinks that they are the Roman pearls he gave me when we were married."

"Poor child, and married! Why did I not know you then, before you were married!"

Valencia paid no attention to this remark. "Tell me what I should do," she said. "Should I tell him about them, or should I keep them hidden, wearing them sometimes, just like this?"

"They are worth a king's ransom," exclaimed the Marquis. "My wi— we have some in our family, not nearly so handsome; they are said to be worth two hundred thousand francs."

"Mine are said to be worth much more than that.

They are my only dowry, Willie, and I must keep them carefully. But when I wear them I do not think of the value—but of my dear father." She fingered them softly as she spoke. She had all the six rings on her fingers. They made a brave show, and flashed under the prismatic rays of the girandoles.

"Someone might hear that you had them and come here and rob the house," said the Marquis, warningly. "What could you do! You, a child, with only a few old men and women about you! You will lose them, Valencia, if you persist in keeping them. You had better let me take them and put them with my own banker, or let me send them there."

"I think that would be an excellent plan," said Valencia, "at least for the winter. We will talk more of it to-morrow. When you go away I will let you have them, perhaps. I shall see, me!"

The night was warm again. A strange change for the time of year. Valencia found her room so oppressive when she retired that she opened the window, closing the blinds, however, and fastening them securely. She locked her door, placed the pearls in the toe of the coarse shoe, and slept the sleep of a child. At about two o'clock in the morning she was awakened by a slight noise. She sat up in bed and listened. Then she slipped softly out of it, and walked lightly to the window.. Had the thieves that the Marquis dreaded for her come after all? The moon was shining, and the world lay in a silver glow. Whoever it was had trusted to her sleeping the sleep of youth. Her room was dark and she stood close by the window and peered down through the blinds, herself unseen. Someone was there, working at the shutter

fastening. The person was enveloped in a long cloak, the hood coming well over the head and hiding the features, but the hands were in plain sight, with their long thin fingers, not any too immaculate, but covered with gems, which flashed in the moonlight and proved to Valencia as soon as she caught sight of them that the midnight visitor was none other than Madame Malafré. Quick as lightning she went to her closet, softly drew her shoe from the shelf, took the pearls from their hiding-place, went to the door, quietly unlocked it, and passed out into the hall. All the household was asleep. Softly, on velvet foot she sped, her feet bare of covering, down the escalier de service, through the kitchen regions, and out through the side door. She heard Radegonde turn in her bed, and cry, "Who is there?" but she was out in the night in a moment, and speeding up the path to her garden.

Madame Malafré would never think of that hiding-place. She was determined at least to feel of the pearls with her prying fingers, if even by stumbling against her, and Valencia was determined to outwit the spy. She ran along to the square plot where stood the apple-tree, the cavity of which she had once shown to Hamptdon. Into this hole she thrust her hand. The pearls were well wrapped in cotton-wool and covered with paper. She would bring the box up here to-morrow. She pushed the parcel well down, and then turned to go back to the château. When she reached the gate she paused to look down across the valley, bathed in a silver mist, lighted by the rays of the moon, which created a fairyland to wonder at. The bitter smell of autumn flowers and leaves was abroad upon the air.

There was quiet everywhere. The very silence of death. How beautiful it all was. She stood for some moments gazing down over the tree-tops. How mysterious! A baby breeze whispered among the branches. She went down the steps, ran up the path, through the kitchen, and softly up to her room. She would not bolt the doors behind her. They might hear her. When she came into her room again, she found that the noise at the blinds had not ceased. Valencia locked the door quietly, and stealthily approached the window. Suddenly she threw the blinds open. "Come in, Madame Malafré," she said. "Entrez, Madame. Je vous en prie."

There was a wild scream from the intruder. She started back and slipped nearly to the edge of the veranda roof, where she crouched in terror. "Come in, Madame," repeated Valencia. "Shall I call the household? Why not enter by the door if you wish to visit me?"

Madame Malafré, finding herself caught, began to scream and cry loudly, and crawl up the roof and toward the window.

"You would like to be my death," she said. "You hate me, you would like to have me fall from the roof down into that depth below. You know very well that a sleep-walker must not be awakened too suddenly," and then she screamed and cried again, more loudly than before. Doors were opened, there was running to and fro.

Suddenly Count Aristodème's voice was heard, then that of the Marquis. They called on Valencia, upon Madame Malafré, upon the servants, to know what had happened. The Marquis, thinking that robbers had attacked the château, fired a pistol out of the end

window of the hall, calling on Gaston to come to him at once. The old Count wrung his hands and cried, and tried to force Valencia's door.

"I cannot open now," said Valencia. "It is Madame Malafré, she is on the veranda roof. She says she is sleep-walking. She should go back to her own room. If she can come thus far on the roof, she can return the same way."

But Madame Malafré was now thoroughly frightened at what her curiosity had brought her to, and the terrible situation in which she found herself. She came crawling upward from the gutter and seized the sill with trembling hands. She dragged herself over it and in through the window. When she was once inside the room she lay upon the floor in a palsied heap, trembling from head to foot. Valencia, disregarding the continued pounding of Count Aristodème and calls to open, open! went to the armoire and opened the door.

There were shouts outside of "Valencie, ouvrez! ouvrez!" There were inquiries from the groom, Radegonde's heavy step sounded in the hall, Aimée's voice could be heard crying on the saints to deliver her, and, above all, the loud tones of the Marquis, ordering peremptorily, "Search the house! Search the house! There is someone concealed in the château." Regardless of all these noises, Valencia took her stout shoe from the closet, and approached Madame Malafré. She bent over her and opened the ankle of the shoe, when a bit of tissue paper fell out.

"That is all that is left of the pearls, Madame," she said. "This is where I have kept them, when I have not worn them under my dress. You might have had

them any day. I knew that you wanted them, but you will never see them. They are hidden where the gods themselves could not find them," and then Valencia suddenly began to realize that she was shaking with cold. She opened the door. "Aristodème," she said, "please tell your friend, Madame Malafré, that when again she tries to gain access to my room, it had better be by the door and not by the window." She pushed the trembling woman through the doorway. Madame Malafré fell upon the Count's striped-cotton shoulder and sobbed out her fear. He led her to her room, soothing her with words of endearment, helped her into her bed and sat holding her hand until she fell asleep, when he, too, lost himself in dreams, with his head upon her pillow.

The early breakfast was a scene of anxious inquiry from the Count and the Marquis. Valencia shook her head and pursed her lips at all questions looking to elucidation of the matter, but after breakfast, when she and the Marquis were alone, she told him the story.

"You are hoarse," he said, "and you cough. Do be careful of yourself, for God's sake, or for my sake. What should I do if I should lose you?"

"That will do, cousin," she said. "Come, let us go for our ride."

During the ride she confided to him her doubts as to Madame Malafré's intentions. "I hardly know what to think," said she, "whether she intended to show the pearls to Aristodème, and make him distrust me, or whether she merely wished to discover whether the pearls are real and valuable."

"Or whether she wants to steal them," said the Mar-

quis. "Take my advice and never let her lay hands on them. When I go you must let me have them, as I told you before, to leave with my banker. You can have them again at any time. I will send you a receipt."

"I think I will do that, Veelie," she said. "Do you know what my present bank is, cousin?"

"No," said he, laughing. "You are capable of putting them anywhere. The shoe was the most original place I ever heard of. Where are they, petite?"

"Of course, you will never tell. No one must know. They are up in my garden, in that large hole in the apple-tree." The Marquis turned in his saddle and looked at her in amazement.

"Valencia! Sometimes I really think you have not even common-sense. Do pardon so rude a speech, but how very careless! Leaving those wonderful jewels out of your keeping for a moment, and in such a place. Go and get them, I beg of you, and give them to me for safe-keeping." Valencia was somewhat abashed; no one had ever spoken to her so seriously before.

"I will, when we return," she said. She laughed. "No one would ever dream of that hiding-place, no one in the world, and you are the only person who knows of it, cousin."

"Doesn't Madame Malafré know? Are you sure? Could she not have seen you?"

"Not possibly; the tower cuts off all view of the garden from the veranda roof."

They had turned and were going home. A man was plodding ahead of them. He wore the uniform of a messenger and carried a blue envelope in his hand. As they came up to him Valencia recognized him as the

man who always delivered the messages from the telegraph office in d'Arcy-Renaud. She stopped her horse. "Are you for Salvaresse?" she asked. A telegram was a rare thing at Salvaresse.

"Is there a Marquis staying there, Madame? I have a message for the Marquis."

"About that new hunter, probably," said the Marquis, though his voice trembled slightly. As he opened and glanced at the telegram his face grew white.

"My God!" he said, "at last!"

"Can you ride, Valencia? Ride fast? Ride quick? I must go away at once. I have had news."

"Bad news, cousin?" said Valencia, anxiously.

"Well—" He said no more; his color began to return; he half smiled, but there were tears in his eyes.

They rode fast, and, reaching the château, everyone was informed that the Marquis must leave at once, his business admitted of no delay. Then was there stir and bustle; every pair of hands and feet was called into requisition to get the Marquis packed and off. It began to rain as his horses, properly groomed again, came to the door.

"I must have a flower from your garden, little cousin, to last me on the weary way."

"I will get it," cried Valencia, cheerfully. "Let me go."

"No, no; it is raining. Cousin, you should take this child into the house. She has taken cold." The Count looked anxiously in Valencia's face. She tried to suppress a cough, and ended by coughing loudly. The Marquis ran up to the garden.

"Ah! What is this?" said the Count Aristodème, kindly. "We must have the doctor."

"I will have no doctor," laughed Valencia. "It is nothing."

By this time the Marquis was coming back from the garden. He had in his hand two very late roses. One he was pressing to his face, his lips, as he came along. This he handed to Valencia. "Wear it," he said, in a low tone. "Wear it to-night after I am gone." He shook hands with the Count. Turning, he drew the second flower across Valencia's lips, threw himself upon his horse, and clattered down the hillside.

"Poor Veelie! Do you know what took him away so suddenly, Valencie?"

"I did not ask. Something about a hunter, I believe."

"No," said the Count, simply. "It was the death of his wife."

"His wife!" said Valencia. "His wife?"

"She died at a Maison de Santé in Paris yesterday."

"His wife! I did not know he had a wife." She felt angry and defrauded. Why should the secret be kept from her, only, of all in the house? She was angry with herself that she had allowed the half of the devotion of the Marquis toward her. For her, it did not matter. Was she not married and was not Aristodème there to take care of her? But now she knew for the first time that he was married, too, that he had no right to be here riding with her, that he had no right to show her devotion while that wife of his was living. Poor creature! Dead! Dead in a Maison de Santé! She wondered why, she wondered how, and as she wondered she went to the edge of the terrace and threw the rose that he had left with her over the precipice down into the roadway below.

At breakfast the Count informed her that Madame Malafré was too ill to come downstairs.

"Too ashamed, she!" thought Valencia. But she did not annoy the Count by this remark. At dinner the Count told her that Madame Malafré had returned home. She had not had an attack like the one on the previous night for many years. She felt that were she at home again she might feel more calm. "When thou seest her again, petite, do not, I beg, mention the occurrences of last night unless she does."

"She will never mention them," said Valencia, "she!"

CHAPTER VIII

IT was very dull after the Marquis had gone. Inexpressibly lonely and dull. There was no one on the hill but the old Count, Madame Malafré, and Valencia herself. They were all gone, all her pleasures, and all at once.

In bright weather the girl spent most of her time in her garden. Sometimes she would even tire of that. She would look up into dull-gray skies, the screen that seemed to shut heaven out from earth, and whisper, "O dear God! for something young! For something young!"

Madame Malafré was not a resident now of the château, so that Count Aristodème spent many hours of his time at the house on the hill above them, and Valencia was left very much alone.

It was cold and chill, but she loved the fresh outer air. Anything was better than the close communion of the old people hovering over the calorifère. Iphigénie was away in Paris buying clothes, being fitted, deciding on laces or spangles, velvet or muslin. "O Paris, dear Paris!" sighed Valencia; "what would I not give to be there, even with the sisters."

She made several visits to Roxane, the blanchisseuse, but she found only parcels of thin summer clothes, with sometimes a trifling ornament. The winds whistled round the castle of the robber knights, and the château

was draughty. Valencia had nothing very warm to wear. Nothing but the long gray cloak which she had worn when she left the convent. Of clothes as a factor in keeping her comfortable she had never thought before. The convent was warm, for she spent her summers there in general, and when her father had come back, as had been usual in the autumn, he had taken her to some southern climate where one thought only of an outdoor life. But womanhood was awakening within the young girl's breast. She had come to an age when one notices the difference that adornment makes in the feminine members of the human family, and she was beginning to long for more of the accessories.

On rainy days, Valencia, having no one to talk with or confide in, adopted the method of unburdening her soul upon the pages of some very thin letter paper belonging to her husband. To the blank page she told her inmost thoughts and feelings, and after reading it over to see that she had omitted nothing of her griefs, she destroyed it usually at the fourneau de cuisine. She stood before the great stove, the coppery glints of the batterie de cuisine throwing fitful yellow-red flashes upon her face, then, when Aimée, at her bidding, had lifted one of the plates of iron from its place, she threw upon the glowing bed of coals all her confidences. Strange vent that is needed, like the scapegoat in the wilderness! And though the paper crimpled and glowed and the letters that she had traced were ashes the coming moment, and although no soul, kindred or other, received her lost confession, still it had been told and her overburdened heart was relieved.

She was seated in her room one day idly thinking.

Within her hand she held the little slip of paper which Hamptdon had given her with the pearls. "To do with as she will," she read. "For my little Valencia. To do with as she will." There came the sound of war from the escalier de service, and, as usual, she knew that Roxane was laboring upward with the heavy hamper of clothes, and that Radegonde, while pretending to aid, was scolding her for ascending her clean back stairs.

When Radegonde's tongue had ceased to wag and her footstep no longer could be heard, Roxane came on tiptoe to Valencia's chamber. She opened the door without knocking, and with a "Pardon, Madame," turned swiftly, closed and bolted it, then taking her first long breath since she had left her cart, she laid a large package upon the bed.

"No wonder she complained at the weight of it!" said Roxane. "Just try to lift it, Madame, or no, your slight arms are not strong enough for such a burden. I wonder she did not suspect, that prying one!"

Valencia flew from her chair at Roxane's entrance and rushed toward the bed. As before, she clutched at the strings, she tore them off, she pulled away the paper. Ah! it was a large box. It blazoned forth in gilt the name of a well-known firm in Paris. What were they celebrated for? She could not remember. Again strings were pulled into knots, then cut with the scissors, the cover tossed aside, the many folds of tissue paper thrown on the floor, and a charming costume of brown cloth with rich fur-trimmings was exposed to the view of Valencia and her confidante, Roxane. Nor was this all. There was a muff of the dernier cri, and a charming collar of fur which felt warm and silky to the fingers.

Valencia could not speak. She had seen such things worn by grand ladies who passed her by in the streets in the great southern cities, driving cold and uncomfortable, where she felt always warm, for was she not young? The sisters naturally were plainly dressed, and, in fact, the thought had never entered her mind, as a child, that she needed more than she had. She had run about with no more thought as to the fashion of her clothing than have the lambs of the field. Her father would have given her anything in or out of season, but what does a father know of such matters unless the feminine part of his belongings demands the luxuries of life? And now—and now— Ah! here was a toque of the same soft-brown shade, with a fur band, a little tail standing upright. Gloves? Ah, yes! pairs on pairs, and boots, high pretty boots with serviceable soles for the country roads. Slippers, too, dear, delightful Louis Quinze heels. "Ah! dear Beel, how had he thought of all this!"

She searched the pocket of the skirt and found again a tiny parcel. Indeed, her stock of jewels was growing so fast that she would soon rival Madame Malafré. She opened the box and an emerald ring flew out upon the floor.

Roxane gazed in wonder.

"It is the young Monsieur then who sends Madame the cadeaux. They are very, very beautiful, but will Madame allow the old Roxane to give her a little of the advice?"

"All you like, dear old Roxane," said Valencia, undressing quickly, and slipping her clothes to the floor. She stepped out of the crumpled ring, seized up the brown skirt and threw it over her head. "Say all you

like, dear Roxane. You are so kind to me that I may well take your advice, though what you know about ladies' clothes I am at a loss to determine. Is it that you would have preferred blue to this pretty brown, or would a dark shade of green have suited better——?"

"—It is not that, Madame la Com——"

"No? What then? You would have thought a black fur prettier than this soft-shaded dark-brown, and the shoes—I wonder if the shoes will fit." She flung herself upon a low stool. "Ah! A trifle large, but what would you have, Roxane, when a young man tries to fit a young girl from so far away as Paris? Besides, I am growing, Roxane; I expect to grow at least an inch before Noël."

"It is not that, Madame la Comtesse," said Roxane, shamefacedly. "It is that I am old, I have seen the world. When young and lovely ladies, like Madame, take the presents from young English Sirs, the world will talk."

"Dear old goose," said Valencia, laughing merrily. "The English Sir does not give me these, and who is there to talk but you? The Count thinks the things I wear are those of ma belle-sœur, the Countess Edmond, and——"

"So the Count does not know that Madame receives the boxes from Paris?" Roxane shook her head a great many times. "So he does not know? That looks very bad, if I may say so, Madame la Comtesse."

"What nonsense are you talking, Roxane! You have been told all along that the Count was not to know. Else why did I have the things sent to you, me? It is something that I cannot tell, neither to you, neither to anyone. The money is mine, I have the right to spend it as I will——"

"Without the Count's knowledge?" said Roxane.

"Roxane," said Valencia, suddenly rising and looking at herself in the mirror. "Who has been talking with you, trying to influence you? I see very plainly that someone has. Very well, then, if it has come to this, that I must bribe you to be faithful to me—" She turned quickly on the blanchisseuse—"How much does Madame Malafré pay you to discover to her my secrets?"

The old woman, thus taken aback, began to twist her apron and cry.

"Three francs? Four? Five? Six? Tell me at once how much."

Roxane by this time was sobbing loudly.

"Silence!" said Valencia. "Do you want the Count to hear you and come to see what is the matter, and discover that his friend Madame Malafré has been bribing you, to whom he has given work for so many years, to tell her the secrets of his wife? Rather than you shall profit by Madame Malafré's francs, I will go to the Count and tell him all. There is nothing to be ashamed of. The money is mine, only it was my little secret, all that I have of my very own, besides the garden up there, and God knows that is not of much comfort a day like this! Come now, tell me quickly, how much she pays you to spy on me."

Between her sobs, Roxane was now led to confess that it was indeed Madame Malafré who had bribed her at the price of two francs fifty centimes a secret, to tell her all that Roxane knew of the Countess Aristodème's doings. "She has paid me nothing yet," sobbed Roxane, "for each time she said that she knew it all before. She is always encouraging me to tell more, but never pays."

"How long has this being going on?" asked Valencia, sternly.

"For a month past, Madame."

"What have you told her as yet?"

"Nothing but about the last package, Madame la Comtesse, and she said that she knew of that already."

"So you have had nothing as yet for your pains?"

"No, Madame, nothing."

"Neither will you get anything from me. I shall go to d'Arcy-Renaud this very day. I shall tell the police there that a friend is sending me the parcels to your care, that you are to be watched, that I suspect you, that if the parcels come to d'Arcy-Renaud, they are first to be inspected, and then sent on to the château direct; there is nothing that my husband shall not know about the affair. Marcelle, on the other side of Chatillon, will gladly take the linen. I wish you good luck with your Madame Malafré, but when I have left you in the lurch, so will she. See now! What have you gained? Not a single centime from Madame Malafré, and dismissal from a place that you have held many years before I came here to live."

"I shall appeal to Madame Malafré," sobbed Roxane.

"Ah!" said Valencia, white to the lips, "will you?"

Roxane sobbed loudly and murmured much about her poor children and grandchildren.

"A spy is not a safe person to have within the house. Here is the money for the washing, and here is a franc for bringing the parcel over. It is what the carrier would charge. You have lost that in the future, because you will have no more to bring. See if I am afraid of you or your employer, Madame Malafré!" She fitted the

toque to her head and pinned it on. Then she began to draw on the brown gloves. "I am going out to walk and all the world may see me." She threw the fur collar around her neck. "Well, why do you wait?" She pointed to the door. "Go," she said, "I have no dealings with spies." She advanced fiercely toward the blanchisseuse and the woman went hastily out of the door.

Valencia ran out of the house in all the glory of new and beautiful clothes. They were rapidly taking away the sting of her anger. She was forgetting Roxane. Where should she go? She did not care whether people saw them or not, she was well and beautifully dressed in a winter costume as handsome as any of those she had seen in Paris. She wondered now why she had never thought of these things before, had never asked for them. She ran down the little side-path and was soon walking briskly on the road toward d'Arcy-Renaud. The air was brisk and fresh, the sun was shining, the road was hard. Ah, God, what a beautiful world! She had gone on her way a mile, perhaps, when she heard the sound of horses' hoofs. Along the road was coming a horseman. She stepped aside to let him pass, but he wheeled about when he saw her, and was out of the saddle and in the road beside her in a moment.

"My cousin! My dear little cousin! is it indeed you?"

It was de Vallée, holding out his hand, joyously, his eyes sparkling, his face showing by beaming smiles how delighted he was to see her again.

"My leettle girl," he said in English. "My leettle Mees," putting his arm around her shoulders and bending his face close to hers.

"Do not," said Valencia, drawing hastily away from him.

"I am not welcome then?"

"You are welcome if you do not annoy me. I cannot bear such actions; you must treat me with respect, Veelie, and then no one will be more glad to see you than I."

The Marquis sighed. "What! How beautiful you are!" he said. "So much more beautiful than before." He looked her up and down, and took in at a glance her modern and fashionable appearance. "How fine your clothes are, petite. Who would have thought that they could make such a difference? You lovely woman! You were a charmingly handsome creature before; now you are a goddess."

"And you don't mind my cast, Veelie?" cried Valencia, with heightened color.

"It is to be worshipped. I should like to kiss you in the very corner of that left eye."

"Veelie! do not spoil all my pleasure in seeing you. I shall go home at once if you say any more of that kind of talk. It is so pleasant to feel that one is not really ugly. You do not mind my uneven teeth, nor my short lip, nor my——"

"If I could say what I would," said de Vallée, advancing nearer, with his eyes alight.

"You may only tell me that I am lovely, that my gown sets well, that I have a fashionable costume, and that you like it, and I shall be happy, Veelie; not because it is you, but because I know that you know what you are saying, and that no man in Paris is a better judge."

"Valencie, Valencie, they would go mad over you in Paris."

"Then I had better not go there," said Valencia, laughing excitedly. "I should be sorry to turn so many heads, me! O Veelie, I wish it were so—I wish it were. You are very kind, and I will try to believe you; I will, indeed." They turned and walked toward Salvaresse, he holding his bridle-rein over his arm, slashing his leathers with the whip held in the other. The groom was now in sight, having stopped at the poste restante to obtain the letters sent on to the Marquis, and there could be no more love-making at present on his part.

"How is my cousin?" asked de Vallée.

"He is well," said Valencia. "I think he misses Phigie and Edmond; I miss them, too—I never thought I should."

"He is an old man now," said the Marquis, "he cannot live long——" He hesitated, and then added the words, "I fear."

"Aristodème not live long! Certainly, he will live long! What should I do if Aristodème were not alive? I could not go back to my uncle Lonsdale; he does not want me. I could not go back to the sisters, after my freedom. My dear father is dead. Perhaps Phigie and Edmond would not turn me out."

"You could come to me, Valencie."

The words were spoken in a whisper, but Valencia heard them distinctly. She started, stood still a moment in the road, but at the words, "Don't, Valencie, Gaston is just behind," she walked on again.

"If you speak to me like that again," she said, "it will be the last. I shall not listen to you. You that have a wife—I that have a husband. It is wicked of you." She whispered these words with eyes straight ahead.

"My wife is dead, Valencie; that you know—there remains between us now only——"

"I shall give you few more warnings," said Valencia, turning away, and striking into the hill path, knowing that it would be impossible for the Marquis to follow with his horse. But not to be outwitted, he beckoned to the groom and threw him the bridle. The man cantered away through the archway with the two horses and the little mare that he was leading, and de Vallée followed Valencia up the hill. Her light and springy step outdistanced him, a man who walked little, and who wore to-day heavy riding-boots. When Valencia reached the veranda, he was still some distance behind her. She heard him call, but walked determinedly on. He called again: "Valencia, I must speak with you for a moment. Do wait a moment; I will not offend."

She waited near the door until he was close to the veranda step.

"Let me ask you one thing. Now, do not be angry. Listen. Oh, I beg of you, just for a moment. If—if—" He gazed up into her face deprecatingly, beseechingly, as if to ask pardon for the words that he was about to utter, then said hurriedly, in a low tone: "If you were free, might I feel that you would think of me? You do love me a little, do you not, Valencie?"

Valencia gave the door-knob a sharp twist. Alceste opened it at the same moment from the inside. Valencia turned again to de Vallée, and said, in a quick undertone: "There is to be silence between us, remember! You will have my husband, and sometimes Madame Malafré to converse with——"

"Except when you and I are alone."

"You will have them always," said Valencia, and stepped inside the hall.

She went at once to the library. Here she found Count Aristodème sitting with Madame Malafré. Their chairs were near a small open fire; the room was very close. Valencia went to the window and threw it open.

"One cannot breathe here," she exclaimed, and looked at Madame Malafré.

"It is too cold to have the window open," said Madame Malafré, and arose to close it.

"Aristodème, you do wrong to stay in the house this wonderful day. Come, come out with me," said his wife. Valencia laid her hand on his arm.

"He is not fit to go out," said Madame Malafré, "and, as for me, I cannot stand that rush of air."

"Is it too cold for you, Aristodème?" said Valencia, putting her hands on his shoulders.

"A—a little," said the Count, shrinking away under her young, vigorous touch and glancing uneasily at Madame Malafré.

Valencia went round in front of her husband, and with calm determination seated herself upon his knee, She put her arms round his neck. He trembled with two phases of feeling. Delight in the near presence of the young girl who was his wife, who belonged to him, and fear of his friend of long standing, Madame Malafré. Valencia put her hand on his head, and, pushing it back, looked into his eyes. "Who do you think has come back?" she said.

"Not Edmond," said Count Aristodème, shifting uneasily.

Valencia took his shoulders in her hands and, leaning

back, looked him laughingly in the eye. She was not oblivious of Madame Malafré's angry and astonished looks, and was enjoying the situation to the utmost.

"Guess, Aristodème, guess!" she said.

Poor Count Aristodème was in such terror of what would come later that he hardly had the strength to utter a word.

"Phigie," he gasped. He hardly knew whether he was on earth or in heaven. He had had few demonstrations of affection from Valencia, and those were always when Madame Malafré was present. He must have a private talk with his wife this very evening.

"No, it is not Phigie."

"Ze 'onorab' Veeliam 'Amp'done," almost whispered Count Aristodème—happy, nervous, terrified, dreading the result, wondering if he were in heaven already, to be later in hell.

"You old dear!" said Valencia, kissing him on the forehead with a resounding smack. "She can't kiss him like that," the girl thought, chuckling. "Hers must be of necessity very much smothered."

"How canst thou be so indelicate, Aristodème? How canst thou allow it?" said Madame Malafré, bristling with anger. "See! there is a stranger coming in. He will see you. It is scandalous—a great girl like that sitting on the knee of an old man."

"He is my husband, is he not, Madame?" said Valencia, still bent on mischief. She was bubbling over with spirits. The new and lovely clothes, the walk in the bracing air of winter, the meeting with de Vallée, who, though he said things that made her angry, still caused her to feel more contented with herself—he was

coming to stay; perhaps they would ride. "Mon Dieu, how beautiful the world is!" exclaimed Valencia, giving Count Aristodème another kiss upon his forehead, making it as noisy as possible, and then she discreetly arose, for de Vallée was indeed entering the room.

"I only went to give orders about the horses," he said. "Ah, my cousin, you will have me again—yes? Madame!" he bowed low to Madame Malafré. He saw in her scowling and jealous face a very valuable suggestion of which he could make good use later.

Valencia noticed for the first time that de Vallée had a band of crêpe on his arm.

"My poor cousin," said Count Aristodème, rising and kissing him. He spoke in a tone such as one would use to a friend who had lost his all.

Madame Malafré had closed the window and turned the handle with a bang. Then she walked over and faced Valencia.

"It seems to me that this girl is dressed very finely to walk in the country roads," she said. "Have you noticed her, Aristodème?"

"Who, Valencie? She always looks very well, mon ami," said the Count, gazing at Valencia's bright color, which came and went quickly now.

"I am glad you approve, Madame," said Valencia, sweeping her a low courtesy.

"We cannot buy such clothes in Chatillon, nor yet in d'Arcy-Renaud."

"No, Madame, only in Paris," said Valencia, smiling mockingly back at her.

"But how to get them from Paris. Do such parcels come by the common carrier?"

"No, Madame, by an uncommon carrier; by a spy, who tells all she thinks there is to tell to her tempter, who promises her money, and does not pay it."

Count Aristodème, frightened, distressed at these signs of battle, arose.

"What is all this, mes petites—what does it mean?"

Valencia arrayed herself physically on his side as she hoped he would array himself mentally on hers, and stood with him, their backs to the fireplace, her hand through his arm.

"It means that Madame Malafré chooses to be impertinent about my clothes. Am I responsible to Madame Malafré, Aristodème, or am I not, me?"

"Well! Well! There, there! petite! You are——"

"Am I responsible to Madame Malafré, Aristodème, as to what I wear, and when?"

"No," broke in Madame Malafré, "you are not responsible to me, thank God, but you are to the Count. You are to society. If you dare to tell the Count where you obtained those clothes, I will apologize to you for my suggestion. Can anything be more fair?"

"But I do not understand," said the helpless old man, looking from one to the other. "Where the child gets her clothes? Has she not always been clothed? Is she not always dressed well enough? What is it, Thérèse? Tell me what thou hast in mind?"

"She only wishes to accuse me before you," said Valencia.

De Vallée was bewildered. He looked at Valencia in wonder. Was it a secret, then, from her husband—all this fine and expensive array? What could Madame Malafré mean by her insinuations?

"Will you tell him where you got that wonderful brown costume?" repeated Madame Malafré. "The finest cloth that is made, trimmed with sable of the darkest and best."

"Oh! Oh! vraiment, Madame? How delightful!" said Valencia, joyously. She removed the fur collar, ran her hands over the fur, and looked at it closely, smiling the while.

"Those handsome shoes came from no one but that expensive bootmaker in the Rue Poissonnière; Pinaud is the name. That muff, which never cost less than a thousand francs; that hat of the latest style. See, as she draws the gloves from her fingers, the flashing of many handsome rings."

"Do not your rings also flash, Madame? Mine came from a jeweller's in the Rue de la Paix; perhaps the very shop which your husband used to keep."

"Valencie, Valencie! What does this mean? Is it all true? Are the things thou art wearing so handsome as all that? Are they not Phigie's? Say they are Phigie's, Valencie—say they are Phigie's, I beg of thee."

Valencia drew away from her husband, and stood looking scornfully at him. Madame Malafré approached him, and they stood together now, the two arrayed against the girl.

"Who sent you the clothes, Valencie?" The Count's voice was almost stern.

"It was that young English Sir," said Madame Malafré, not trusting herself to pronounce his name. "Roxane has told me all about it. The parcels come to her to her house, là-bas, beyond Chatillon; she has been bringing them here for three months and more. She has told me all about it."

"At the promise that she would get two francs fifty centimes for each disclosure, but she tells me this afternoon that she has had no pay as yet."

"She tells you—" shrieked Madame Malafré.

"Madame, a spy will work for the highest bidder. I could have bought her from you, but I scorned to do it. I scorn her and you."

"She has not confessed yet where she obtained the clothes, the jewels—" whispered Madame Malafré in the ear of the miserable old man at her side.

"You pretend to care for him, and you will not spare him. A fig for such affection as yours, Madame. Do not believe her, Aristodème, dear Aristodème. See! I can tell you all about it, me! I can show you that there is nothing wrong in my wearing these things." Valencia approached him. She knelt at his side, and held his hand in both of hers. "She will try to come between us, but you will not let her, Aristodème; you will not let her. I can explain——"

"And wilt thou, petite?"

"Yes! Yes! Yes! but not before her, Aristodème."

"Wilt thou tell me, then, when we are alone?"

Valencia hung her head. "I would rather not, Aristodème; I would rather not. Cannot you trust me—oh, cannot you?"

"Thou canst not trust a young thing like that," whispered Madame Malafré. "What cares she for the honor of an old man?"

Valencia heard the words. She sprang to her feet. Her eyes were flashing. She stood erect and scornful, and pointed her finger at Madame Malafré accusingly, the disputed jewels flashing in the glow of the setting sun.

"If I care for his honor, Madame! I care for my husband's honor more than you can ever understand; more than he knows; more, Madame—a thousand times more—than you ever cared for the honor of the late Monsieur Malafré, jeweller of the Rue de la Paix."

"You are rude, Valencie," said the Count, gravely. "Beg Madame Malafré's pardon instantly."

"And is it to beg her pardon, me! No, Aristodème, it is she who must beg mine—and you too, Aristodème, you too." And then, her excitement giving way, Valencia burst into floods of tears. "O dear Veelie," she said, turning to him and holding out her hands, "you are the only one who understands me, the only one. I have no friends but you." "Beel" came up in her heart, but then, dear old Beel was far away. She had lost his address—he did not write, he did not come; she had no friend but de Vallée.

Valencia went to her room and locked the door. She took off the pretty brown dress and hung it away in the armoire. After all, it had given her little pleasure, only sorrow and tears. She remained upstairs, not going down to dinner. Radegonde brought her some bouillon. "And to see *her* stuff," said Radegonde, glancing downward as if she could have killed Madame Malafré. "How long will the good Lord allow her to live?"

That evening, when Madame Malafré had retired, there was a soft, timid knock at Valencia's door. She opened as gently. Her eyes were red with crying. She still sobbed like a little child who has worn itself out with grief, one who suffers alone, who is misunderstood, who has no friends. The person who had knocked was

Count Aristodème. "Petite," he said, "forgive me." He seated himself. "What was I to do?"

"Do you believe me, Aristodème?"

"I—I—hardly know what to say, Valencie, but thou wilt tell me all, dear child; all the truth, wilt thou not? Come here to my arms. Come rest on my knee as thou didst this morning, and lay thy head on my breast, and tell me all. We may sit so when Madame Malafré is not present. When she is present she is too much angered. It will not do."

"I have no wish to sit on your knee, Aristodème, no wish at all. I am too big and strong; you cannot hold me on your rice-fed legs. It is I who should hold you —I, who walk over the hills and eat the poulet, and do not sit cowering by the fire with Madame Malafré, getting weak in morals, and eat the cereals to get weak in the legs."

The reference to the walk over the hills reminded her husband why he had come.

"Ah! It was the clothes that I came to speak of, petite, and the rings. Thou wilt tell me all?"

"You will promise not to tell Madame Malafré?"

At once she saw the hopelessness of this request. To ask him to conceal anything from Madame Malafré was useless. Not because he wished to tell her, but because she would worm it out of him. "No," she said, "I see you cannot; then I cannot tell you. And let me tell you this, Aristodème. As to sitting on your knee, I will sit with pleasure on your knee, me"—the Count straightened, and his face brightened—"every day, if you like, for an hour at a time, but always in the presence of Madame Malafré." The Count collapsed. "She seems to

think I need the chaperonage. Very well, then, let her come and chaperon you and me, and I will sit on your knee every day for an hour when she is by."

"When she is by." The Count drooped his head sadly as he repeated her words.

"And why not?" broke in Valencia. "It is Madame Malafré who thinks I need a chaperon. Very well, then, let her be that chaperon. Let her watch every sign of your affection for me, if you have any, Aristodème. You know our compact. I was to be as a young girl, a daughter. You did not want me for a wife. I was not to tutoyer you; we do not so in English, and I am of the English-speaking people. I have not never done so. I was to be free of you, free of the convent, and you were to have my money." She stopped short. "O mon Dieu!" she said, "my money!"

Count Aristodème arose and walked slowly to the door.

"I will ask no more," he said. "If thou wert not guilty of something wrong, thou wouldst confess all to me, thy husband."

"To you," answered Valencia, with decision, "but not to Madame Malafré."

His friend was lying in wait for him as he came down the corridor. "And thou hast been with her," she hissed. The old man trembled. Thus between two fires—the indignation and coldness of a young woman, his wife, and the jealousy of an old one, his life-long friend—his existence was more than any human being should be asked to bear.

"I wished to know about the clothes and the jewels," he said. "I have been trying to discover."

"Thou wert there a long time."

"I thought it very short—but a few moments."

"And she would not tell thee?"

"Not unless I promised to keep it from—to—to—tell no one."

"Thou hadst better not do that, chèr ami," said Madame Malafré, gritting her teeth. "She has told thee nothing, then?"

"No, but I cannot believe the child wrong in any way. She is too innocent, too childish. They must be old chiffons of Phigie's."

"Did she not tell me, before thee, that they came from Paris?"

"That may have been to anger thee, and besides, Phigie's things all come from Paris."

"Very well, then, one who would try to anger me—thy friend of so long standing—must be wicked. Thou shouldst turn her out. Thou shouldst separate from so wicked a woman."

"Our Church forbids, Thérèse. Thou knowest that our Holy Church forbids."

"Hers does not forbid; she is a heretic."

"I am bound, if she is not."

"I cannot see that, Aristodème. Mon ami, I cannot see that. She is a wicked, designing woman. She is deceiving you. It would be best to get rid of her."

Madame Malafré talked in this way day after day. It was like water dropping, dropping, dropping, and sometimes Count Aristodème thought that, as Valencia spoke to him only in public, perhaps after all it would be better to send her away, if only to have peace. If nothing else were left, there was the convent. He

was not at all sure that they would take her in—she, a married woman—but something must be done, and that soon, or he would go mad between the two.

Valencia could not long remain angry with her only friend, and de Vallée had promised not to offend again. The rides had been resumed, giving Madame Malafré cause for various sorts of jibes and jeers at the expense of Valencia. These she indulged in when alone with the Count. She was usually silent now when in Valencia's presence. Valencia never noticed her, never spoke to her, anywhere, at any time.

As it was a part of Madame Malafré's plan to estrange the Count from his young wife, so it must necessarily be a part of her plan to throw the girl and de Vallée together. She was storing up a fine crop of incidents to relate when once the girl was safely out of the house, turned away from the only home that was hers by right.

Valencia was young and attractive; this Madame Malafré could not forbear admitting to herself. The Marquis was fascinating, and none too old to find Valencia the same. Something scandalous must happen—something must go wrong if they were only left alone together often enough; and with this end in view she said nothing about the recurring frequency of the rides to the Count, who, as long as his enslaver was content and left him in peace, had nothing to say.

Still, whenever the opportunity presented itself, she was ever whispering in his ear short sentences like the following: "She is so wicked for one who is so youthful." "She will disgrace thee later." "Get rid of her now, that thou and I may spend some happy days together before we die." "She married thee under false pretences. She

came to thee empty-handed. Come to me, my coffers are full." When women live the life of a Madame Malafré they become more and more depraved, until at last there is no depth to which they will not sink. Ten years ago, under the same circumstances, the Count would have seized upon this advice with avidity. Indeed, a very few months ago, he would have been only too anxious to have it made clear how such a consummation could be brought to pass. But a time had come when Madame Malafré went about more without her mask, and the vacillating old man began to discover that she was not always just to Valencia. Besides which, the moments when his young wife kissed him on the forehead for good-morning, in the presence of them all, put her arms about him when she came up behind his chair, and laid her curly head on his old black cap—these moments sent small thrills through his frame; he forgot Madame Malafré's insinuations, and he wondered if it were possible for himself and Valencia to get away, quite away from everyone in the word, just he and she. He was sure that when they were quite alone, she would tell him all the truth, reserving nothing, and he tried to assure himself that he was not afraid of that truth—that is, when he was left to think for himself.

De Vallée did all in his power at this time to open the innocent eyes of Valencia to the machinations of Madame Malafré. One day the Count had come in upon them as they were speaking English, the Marquis doing his best, and getting laughed at for his pains. "Eet ees une descente de la Tour de Babel!" exclaimed the Count, willing to let them see that he, too, understood English, and could speak it if he chose. "La confusion des langues,

of tongue, you know, Veelie," nodding at the Marquis. "Ze 'onorab' Veeliam 'Amp'done, ven 'e ees vith us, 'e speeke la langue Anglais-Français. Phigie parle le Greque. Vee speeke ze tongue of French, though I know otheres; et le Marquis, thou Veelie, speeke quelquefois la langue Français-Anglais, et autre fois pour faire la confusion, thou speeke some tongue Italien. I tell thee, Valencie, c'est une descente de la Tour de Babel, une descente veritable de Babel."

"I see through it," said the Marquis to Valencia, when they were again alone. "It is her doing. She does not like us to speak English; she does not understand it. We must speak French after this to please her."

"For me," returned Valencia, "that is what I shall not do. English is my native tongue. I shall not please her by speaking French. It is the English that I shall speak; I shall not speak nothing else."

In the conversations between Valencia and de Vallée, Madame Malafré, her vision colored by her mind, saw only that which was dishonorable and underhand. She often said to the Count: "What dost thou suppose they find to talk about? If they have nothing to conceal, why speak in a foreign tongue? I should insist that she at least speak the language that we all understand."

"Hast thou ever tried to control Valencie?" asked the Count. And there ended Madame Malafré's second lesson.

CHAPTER IX

MADAME MALAFRE continued to urge drastic measures, and it was to no other than old Félix that Valencia was indebted for a share in the secret.

She had come in from her ride one day, and had gone down to see the horses stabled. The stables, like those at Wesenstein, were cut in the rock at the back of the château, and were perhaps thirty feet below the main part of the structure. Félix was wiping down the pretty mare which Valencia had ridden. "Nom de Dieu!" he said. "But the little Madame rides hard. Like the Lord of Hell—that is the way she rides."

"I do no such thing, Félix, me!" said Valencia, coming suddenly upon him. "The little mare shows quickly if she goes off a walk. I walked her almost all the way home. You may ask the Marquis." And then Valencia thought over the events of the morning.

They had been riding at a smart pace, and were on their way back to Salvaresse.

"Let us dismount for a while, cousin, and sit by the waterfall," the Marquis had said.

"And why? Why must I sit by a damp waterfall when I have come out for a ride? I can sit by the waterfall at any time, Veelie, but to ride this shining little brown mare—that is, indeed, a pleasure which I may not have again all my life." She glanced at the waterfall,

and her rescue by Hamptdon from his friend's insult came back to her.

"You may ride a better one all your life if you will," said the Marquis.

"How?"

"The time will come, petite, if you will wait. If we love each other—if you love me, if I love you, all will come right in the end."

"What is that love?" asked Valencia, earnestly. "It is something of which I know nothing, and I think it is something of which you know nothing. You do me great dishonor to talk so to me. Be serious."

"And am I not serious?" broke in the Marquis. "Was I ever more serious?" and indeed, to look at him, one could see that he spoke earnestly.

"Do not speak English, Veelie, you make yourself absurd; then I must laugh at you."

He looked angrily at her. "So," he said in French, "one must speak a language perfectly, to gain your love."

"Ah, what is that love?" repeated Valencia. "The person who loves one will not try to disgrace that one. The person who loves you, even if you should throw yourself into his arms—even if you mean no harm, even if it is not wrong—he will say for your sake, 'Back, back! Go back! You must not, it annoys me.'"

"And who has been teaching you this?" asked the Marquis.

"I have had no teacher. Who is there to teach me? My own heart, my own soul, my own memory."

Félix looked up to see why the little Countess was so long silent.

"Madame la Comtesse will have but little riding if Madame Malafré gets her way."

"What do you mean, Félix? What way does she want to get? Does she wish to take away the horses from us?"

Félix shook his head circumspectly, and whistled an accompaniment to his rubbing down of the little mare.

"What, then, does she want to do — that Madame Malafré?"

Félix stopped rubbing, and slapped the mare to make her stand over. Then he examined her hoofs and fetlocks. Then continued his whistling.

"Why don't you tell me, Félix? Was I not always kind to you, me? What grudge have you against me?"

"It is because that I have no grudge against Madame la Comtesse that I am not anxious to tell her that which will make her unhappy."

"To make me unhappy; and can you make me unhappy, me?" She had almost added, "I that have the brown costume trimmed with fur, the blue and the white dresses, and rings enough to make even Madame Malafré envious."

"Did you not call me a godenot?"

"I, Félix, I? When, then, did I call you a godenot, me?"

"When the English Sir 'Amp'done was here. Did not Madame la Comtesse say, 'There comes that bossu, that godenot Félix'?"

"I never called you a bossu, Félix. I may have called you old, old Félix—something of that sort."

"Dans le temps j'étais bien fort," sighed Félix, with a retrospective glance at his youthful days.

"I may have said godenot, but that was just an amus-

ing bit of persiflage. I should not care if one called me a godenot—I that am not one."

"I should like to hear them," said Félix, with fire in his eye, which showed Valencia that she had a friend whom she had little counted upon.

"Oh, you dear, good Félix! Would you be my friend? One need not care to be called godenot, Félix, if one is not godenot, and neither one of us is that; we need not mind."

This being taken into partnership, as it were, with the Countess, gave Félix a shock of joy. He slapped the little mare into the stall, threw down his whisp of hay, and approaching Valencia as near as she could bear it, said, in a hoarse whisper, "Has Madame la Comtesse any friends?"

Valencia stood and thought. Then she slowly shook her head. "No," she said, "I think not one."

"What of the English Sir?" said Félix.

"He is a friend, Félix. I knew him when we were little things, that high, but I do not even know where he is. I could not tell him anything if I wished."

After this admission of Valencia, Félix stood and shook his head for some time.

"What is the matter, Félix?" asked Valencia, breaking the silence.

Félix shook his head several times more, and then said:

"Does the little Madame remember the last day when the English milor was at Salvaresse?"

Valencia nodded. How could she forget it?

"Does Madame la Comtesse remember the little book that he used to write in—the one with the dark blue cover with silver butterflies all over it?"

"Félix! Have you found it? O dear Félix, then I can——"

Félix raised his horny hand. "Madame la Comtesse will have to pardon me; wait a minute. I have made up my mind to confession. It is hard, I must take my own time. I was near the garden; I saw the writing in the back. I thought it was some love-message which so young a lady should not read; I was raking the leaves, as Madame will recollect, and I——"

"You hid it under the leaves, Félix? Come, come, it may be, then, still under—those—leav—" Valencia's words dropped from her lips slow, and more slowly as she looked into the face of Félix.

"I carried it all summer, I could not read it; but in the autumn, when it was time for the fires—I—I——"

"O Félix, you burned my book, you burned my book. Ah, then! I fear I cannot send for my friend, or for his sister. It was her address that he wrote, only her address. O Félix, Félix!"

Félix shifted from one foot to the other. "I did it for good," he said. "I should not be blamed. What of the Marquis?"

Again Valencia stood and thought. Finally, she raised her eyes to those of Félix, inquiringly. "What is it to do?" she said. "How to use this friend?"

"For protection," replied Félix. "To stand by you when there is trouble. La Vieille is making trouble—all the time, all the time."

"What sort of trouble, Félix?" said Valencia, opening her eyes very wide.

"All the time, all the time, of every kind. When I go up the stairs into the boot closet, off the escalier de

service, I hear her talking, talking, talking. Click-clack, click-clack, click-clack, as if it would never end. It is like the mill-wheel at the farm of Dobran the miller. Click-clack, click-clack, all the time, all the time."

"Yes, I know," Valencia nodded her head. "She is always talking and she is always trying to make trouble, but she cannot make trouble for me. My husband will not allow it, the Count."

Félix closed one eye, put his tongue in his cheek, and gave a click in the roof of his mouth.

"Madame la Comtesse will pardon that vulgarity, but it is expressive of my feelings. I tried to warn the Madame long ago, when the English Sir was here. I endeavored to remain in the garden watering; I knew the English Sir would return—the bees always come again to the same fragrant flower; I waited and watched for that."

"O Félix!"

"And the Madame would have poured the water over me, the old man of all work, the godenot."

Valencia took a step forward. "Félix," she said, "forgive me. It was a shame that I spoke so. You will forgive me, I know. I am very young, Félix, hardly seventeen. I have always been careless in my speech. I must try to do better." Her eyes were wet at this proof of interest in the humble old serving-man.

"Ecoutez!" said Félix, coming also a pace nearer. "It is not necessary to weep yet, that comes later. They are always talking, those two, of one thing. Rather, she is talking and he is listening, but it is as bad sometimes to listen as to talk. It convinces one, that listening. Does Madame la Comtesse know what she wishes? She

wishes to get rid of Madame la Comtesse—the old one, there."

"O Félix!" Valencia's eyes started from her head. "How?" She looked at the hill, she ran to the door of the stable and glanced over the precipice. "Would—would she try to——"

"Not so bad as that, Madame la Comtesse," said Félix, "and yet perhaps worse. There are worse ways than——"

"Death, you mean?" said Valencia. "Worse ways than death?" Every trace of color had flown from her lips. "O Félix, what could she do to me? What could she make him do? Husbands cannot put their wives in prison, can they, those husbands?"

"No, not that, but they can turn them out. She is trying to get him to turn Madame la Comtesse out. She says that Madame la Comtesse has deceived the Count. That he must get a lawyer and a priest, and undo the marriage in some way, even if he has to go to the Pope himself. She has the money, la Vieille."

The girl stood looking at the old man with eyes full of horror. Her face was white as the snow which had fallen scantily that morning.

"And where, where should I go? Félix! Where should I go if they turned me out, I that have no friends? My reputation would be gone, Félix, if my husband turned me out. I have done nothing wrong, Félix. Oh! it is a shame that I must stand here and tell you this, but, Félix, I have no friend in the world, no one that I can trust."

"There is the Marquis," said Félix, tentatively.

She shook her head. She had covered her face with

her hands, the tears were trickling through her fingers. Instinct told her that the Marquis was not a friend to whom she could apply at such a time. This was a horror of which she had not dreamed. Losing home and shelter, poor though it was, and reputation at the same time, was a dread that she could not master all in a moment.

"Are you sure, Félix?" she asked, thickly, from salt-stained lips.

"Do I not hear them every day, Madame? They are at it now, perhaps. If Madame la Comtesse were to go up there now—I am about to carry up the boots—Madame could hear for herself. Come! I will get them; I did them this morning. I will carry them up the escalier de service. Madame can follow. After I have deposited the boots and have left the closet, Madame la Comtesse may remain."

"To listen! To listen! I have never done that, but if it is of me that they speak, and about me, I have the right. Go, Félix, I will come."

She mounted the road and went swiftly toward the house, and as the old man stumbled up the stairs she followed softly. At the head she heard: "And who is that? You again, Félix?"

"And who but me," said Félix, "with the boots."

"Very well, then; put them down and go. You are always interrupting me. You!"

"As Madame la Comtesse sees, she gives orders already in anticipation, the old one there," whispered Félix. "Now, if Madame will remain in the corner, she will hear more than will satisfy her."

Félix went out of the door and stumbled down the stair.

"What a racket he makes, that miserable servant of yours, Aristodème. Were I in charge he should not annoy the heads of the house in that manner. Il descend bruyamment."

Valencia pricked up her ears. "The heads of the house," that was significant. She crouched quietly on the floor and listened.

"How long would it take to hear from the Archbishop, mon ami?"

"I have not written him, Thérèse, of that," said the old Count, faintly.

"And do not intend to do so?"

"I—I—am not very well, mon ami. Do not urge it just yet; besides, it is not right. We cannot set ourselves up against this young girl. She is but a child."

"If she were innocent she would confess. Perhaps the Archbishop is not the one. There is a priest of whom we can ask what shall be done. He lives beyond Dallance on the way to Ouvrey. We can send a line to him——"

Valencia recalled with a chill that priest's forbidding face.

"Not to-day, Thérèse," said the Count, with wonderful courage; "not to-day, do not ask me."

The Count's negative attitude seemed to irritate Madame Malafré past all endurance. "She is deceiving thee," she cried, "and thou sittest down like this. She is leading a bad life. She receives presents from ces messieurs. That necklace was worth a fortune, but she has hidden it so well that I cannot find it. The truth must be told." As Madame Malafré finished her sentence the door burst open and Valencia stood in the entrance.

"The truth shall be told, Madame," she said. "I know that the Archbishop comes on Sunday; I know that Aristodème has asked him to stay with us, as the Quentin are away. He will be at the cathedral in the morning, and Aristodème had given orders that all shall be ready for him after the service, and for the night."

"And not to tell me!" said Madame Malafré, turning reprovingly to Count d'Alêne.

"I am not of your religion, Madame; I am, as you know, a Protestant," said Valencia, "but I am willing to confess, yes, to confess all, to that dear old gentleman, that holy man whom everyone loves, who will stand for once to me in the place of my God, for my God, though He hears me, cannot make you believe my innocence. He does not speak with such as you. Do you hear, do you hear me, Aristodème? I am willing, nay, glad to confess all to the Archbishop, but unless the seal of confession is upon the interview, it will never take place. He may tell you, Aristodème; he may tell all to you."

"I do not wish to know," said the Count, faintly, glancing fearfully at Madame Malafré, as if he could see the prospective moral corkscrew with which she would tear the secret from his breast.

"Thou must know, mon ami, Aristodème! A husband should know all the secrets of his wife," said Madame Malafré. "She must tell thee, of course, for the Archbishop will counsel that, I am certain."

"If there is any chance of your hearing my confession, then my lips will be sealed," said Valencia; "so take your choice, Madame," and she turned and went out, closing the door.

"And why should the Archbishop be invited here,

mon ami?" asked Madame Malafrê, when Valencia's steps had echoed down the corridor, in a tone which implied, "And I not know it."

The Count sighed. "He is a friend of the San Gênes. He has always promised to be here at the first communion of the petits San Gênes. The people at the Abbey are away. As thou knowest, he stays with them when he is here. The San Gênes have an aunt who is very ill and strange. All their support comes from her. She cannot bear a sound. The idea of guests drives her to the verge of madness. The last time that they had anyone, she arose, ill as she was, and dressed, declaring that she would go to Paris. Then she had a syncope. She will not have even the Archbishop, whom everybody adores."

"How didst thou know all this?" inquired Madame Malafré, suspiciously, "when I did not?"

"Are there not always rumors in the air, mon ami? Come, my little one, be sage, and do not excite thyself. It is certainly for our interest to have the Archbishop here. He will settle all these vexed questions."

Madame Malafré rather dreaded the Archbishop's advent. She had heard much of his lofty character, and she felt that perhaps while he was at Salvaresse it would be well for her to keep rather more in seclusion than was usual.

"And if his Grace agrees that it is proper for a young girl to receive clothes and jewels from young men whom she scarcely knows, then I renounce my religion. That would be indeed un peu trop fort."

The four days intervening between the day of this conversation and the Sunday of the Archbishop's arrival dragged at some moments with intolerable slowness for

Valencia, and at others flew on lightning wings. What if the Archbishop should take the side of the others against her! What if he should not believe her! What if he should say that he would not listen to her confession, that she was a heretic, that his high office of counsellor and friend was not for such as she! What if he would hear her only if she would promise to tell all to her husband later! No! On that point Valencia was settled in her determination. Nothing, not the powers of the church, nor heaven nor hell, should drag her secret from her breast and give it into the keeping of Madame Malafré.

CHAPTER X

THE Archbishop had been dining with Mr. and Mrs. Quentin in Paris. The conversation had turned on the Abbey, Moncoussis, d'Arcy-Renaud and their surroundings. They talked of their country neighbors, and finally of Salvaresse.

"Poor little Countess!" said Mrs. Quentin; "I am afraid she is very lonely up there. I have thought of asking her here to stay for a few weeks; I wonder if they would allow it."

"I could ask the Count, if you wish; I am going there next week," said the Archbishop. "I could carry a note."

"What! Your Grace going to Salvaresse, and in this weather?" Mrs. Quentin looked appealingly at her husband, as if he could put a stop to this unheard-of proceeding if he would.

"Not to Salvaresse, exactly, though I could make it my business to go there if you wish," said the Archbishop. "I shall be at d'Arcy-Renaud over Sunday. Les petits San Gênes are to be confirmed. I promised their mother long ago that I would, if possible, be with them at their first communion. Were it a little later, I could not be sure."

"Dear Archbishop," said Mrs. Quentin. "You will live to comfort us all, many years yet."

"It is too much to ask, that!" said Gartha Valery.

"They are grasping, those San Gênes. Grippe-sous, those San Gênes!"

"No, no! Not too much to ask, petite. Besides, I have promised."

"They might have chosen the summer time, those!" said Gartha. "Les arbres bourgeonnent en Avril, et nous allons à la campagne en Juin. Your Grace could go with us there."

"Will you surely see the d'Alêne, your Grace?" asked Mrs. Quentin.

"If you wish, yes."

"You will be uncomfortable at the Trois Princes. How I wish that we had the Abbey open. I could send someone down. Let me give orders." She half arose.

"I beg that you will do nothing of the kind. It will be for a night only. The hotel is very well."

"Why not let me send a line to the old Count saying that you are coming?" said Quentin, and then added, "I do not wish to interfere."

Mrs. Quentin glanced at the Archbishop. He was looking at her husband from under half-closed lids. He smiled faintly. Had he spoken his thoughts he would have said, "It would not be the first time, my friend." When he spoke, he said: "Why do you think the little Countess so lonely?"

"How can she help being lonely, your Grace? Count Edmond and his wife are here in Paris. They stay with those rich banker people, the Régences. I saw them at the opera last night. Their box is not far from ours. The child is there alone with that old man."

"You forget Madame Malafré," said Gartha.

"Gartha, what do you know of Madame Malafré?"

said Quentin, with a note of disapproval in his voice. "She does not live with them; her house is on the hill."

"I think she lives there as much as one can live in another's house. I used to run up there sometimes, when Mademoiselle thought me occupied with my lessons. She was always with them, at Salvaresse—at least, with the Count. The little Countess was in her garden. Always."

"Si tu faites l'école buissonnière tu n'apprendras rien," said the Archbishop, laying a kind hand on Gartha's dark locks.

When the Archbishop had gone away, Mrs. Quentin said to her husband: "John, I should be glad if you would write to the old Count, for several reasons. First, I do not want our dear old friend to take cold at the little inn. You could ask in your letter if the little Countess had thought again of the bulbs that she promised me, and then you could say that the Archbishop is coming for next Sunday, and that he cannot go to the San Gênes, that we are away——"

Quentin laughed and laid his hands on the shoulders of his wife. "A deceiver already, Alixe. Is that what marriage has done for you?"

"You know what it has done for me, John," she said, and hid her face on his shoulder.

So it came about that Quentin wrote to the old Count, and in time an invitation was received by the Archbishop, inviting him to spend his Sunday at Salvaresse, an invitation which was gladly accepted by him.

CHAPTER XI

IT was the afternoon of Sunday. The Archbishop had arrived at Salvaresse. It was a strange household into which he had been ushered. His host, an old man, Count d'Alêne, with a wife so young that she might have been his grand-daughter. A lady, Madame Malafré, a widow, who seemed to live, as Gartha Valery had said, at the château, and the fourth inhabitant, a gay widower from Paris, who had come ostensibly for the shooting, when everyone knew that the season of shooting had passed. The Archbishop was shrewd and independent in judging for himself. The second breakfast was late because of his being detained by the service at the cathedral, and as he sat at the delicate, though bountiful table, he looked round on them all and tried to take in the situation.

"You will rest a little after déjeuner, your Grace," said the Count.

"If I may sit in that very comfortable-looking armchair in your salon for a half-hour," returned the Archbishop, "I will rest, and then I shall be ready for anything that you may have for me to do. I thought I understood there was something?"

Madame Malafré, though outwardly all smiles, was raging within. That was the chair in which she reclined every day herself, her devoted Aristodème by her side,

pouring into her ears the flattery upon which she lived, and without which she could not exist, a fact which was becoming very wearisome to her aged admirer.

"I should like to have a few words first with you, your Grace," said the Count. Valencia bit her lip with a tightening of the heart. She knew what those few words would be. Would Aristodème prejudice this dear old man against her? She thought not. He tried to be just; he would be just, she thought, if he were left to himself. She looked down with a rising of color in her cheeks, and passed quickly out of the door. Aristodème meant to tell the Archbishop about her, about what they thought her wrongdoings. She had herself suggested this; she had said that she would confide in him. Very well, then, she would confess all, but only in case that it was to go no farther. Wild horses should not drag her secret from her if Madame Malafré must be taken into their confidence.

She ran out of the door and quickly mounted the steps which led to her garden. Bareheaded and chill, the comfort she sought there was a cold one, and she went along the path and paused by the old apple-tree. She looked at the place where she had hidden the necklace. She had stealthily examined the recess once or twice and had found the parcel intact. She brushed a little snow from the opening and was just about to insert her hand in the cavity when she heard Félix lumbering through the gate. He was dressed in his Sunday best, but that made little difference. He had seen his young mistress come up into the garden and he had followed in the hope of a talk with her.

He came hobbling along the garden-walk. "Aïe!

Aïe!" he said, as he came near. "When are we to get rid of that piece of interference, la Vieille là-bas?"

Valencia, knowing well whom he meant, shook her head. "I do not know, Félix," she said. "I see no hope of any change."

"She, la Vieille, is trying to get rid of Madame la Comtesse; Madame la Comtesse is trying to get rid of la Vieille. Let us see who will win."

"She will, probably," said Valencia, sighing.

"And what is the priest here for?" asked Félix. "Cannot we say our prayers up here without a fashionable priest from Paris? Is there a new fashion in the way of kneeling, in the holding of the hands, that we must be taught by a priest from Paris?"

"That is a very great man, Félix," said Valencia. "He is an Archbishop. They talk of making him a Cardinal soon. They say that he is the most just and the kindest man that lives, who is in your church. I am not of your communion, Félix, but I could wish that I had a friend like that. Mademoiselle Valery at Bref has told me of him."

"Ah!" said Félix, sighing. "It is easy to be good when one is rich. The hard thing is to be pious when one is poor. I wonder how pious this fine Archbishop of yours would be if he had to care for the horses of the Marquis while that lazy Gaston flirts even with the old Radegonde. I should like to change places with that Archbishop of yours, Madame la Comtesse."

"You would look fine in an Archbishop's robes, Félix," said Valencia, laughing for the first time in days. "Who is that?"

It was Alceste to say that the Count "begged that

Madame la Comtesse would have the goodness to descend to the château."

Valencia bit her lip, her heart beat furiously. Her face grew crimson, then pale. "Tell the Count that I will come," she said. She felt as if some terrible operation were about to take place. She slowly descended the stone steps, leading down from her happy garden, dragged her feet along, toward the château, and entered the hall, to find her husband awaiting her.

She threw her arms around his shoulders and laid her head on his breast. "Ah! Aristodème," she said. "Must I go in? I am terribly afraid. He is a stranger to me; I am not of his church. Rendrez moi la justice, Aristodème! What can he do to me?"

"He can do nothing to thee, child. He wishes to do nothing to thee! Only tell the truth, I beg. It was thy suggestion. We cannot go back now."

"I will tell him the truth," said Valencia, straightening herself, her eyes flashing, "if that will satisfy you, but it is a truth that Madame Malafré shall never hear."

When she reached the great door of the salon, her heart sank down, down, down. Should she go in? Should she turn and run away from this bar of justice? But the Count was behind her. There was no running away. He opened the door and pushed her gently in. "Here is the little penitent, your Grace," he said. "Do not spare her. She is ready to confess to you," and then her husband closed the door behind her, and she was left alone facing this terrible old man, this dignitary of the Church, this prelate of whom all Paris talked, this priest to whom wrong and deceit were as abhorrent as they were to the saints in heaven, this man who had never

sinned, and could not understand the enormity of a crime like hers, for now that she was in his presence, the constant reproaches of Madame Malafré and the acquiescent reproach and anger of her husband came back to her with redoubled force, and while she knew that she had not consciously done wrong, still she did not know how this great man would regard it. She stood waiting by the door, her head down-drooped, her cheek pale. She had never been in so grand a presence before. She felt sure that he was looking coldly upon her, she dared not raise her eyes.

"Come here, my child. What terrible thing have you been doing?"

She lifted her head and looked at him. The dreaded Archbishop was leaning back in the great arm-chair, smiling and holding out his hand. She ran toward him and threw herself upon her knees by his side.

"I should have arisen for Madame la Comtesse," said the Archbishop, "but here we have only a sorrowful little child, n'est-ce pas, petite, who wishes to confide all her troubles to an old man."

Valencia had burst into a passion of tears. She had expected coldness, and a demand that she should unburden her wicked heart to a dignitary of the Church; instead of this she felt all at once as if she had found a friend, one who spoke in as kind a voice as her dead father's.

The Archbishop lightly stroked the girl's hair as she sobbed out her heart before him, and waited. His own eyes were not dry. He had seen much trouble, much sadness in his long life, had passed through deep waters of sorrow, but there was something pitiful and new to

him in this charming young creature's utter abandonment to grief. He waited, smoothing the bright hair. When the sobs had somewhat subsided, he said: "This is not the confessional, my child, except as one friend, a young one, confides in another, an old one. I do not ask to know your troubles unless you wish to tell me. Your husband," he sighed at his mental picture of the little old Count, "your husband has told me that there is something on your mind, something that you will not tell him, or his friend, Madame——"

"Let us leave her out of the conversation, your Grace; the matter is between my husband and me. Is not that as it should be? Has anyone the right to interfere?"

She lifted a flushed face, wet with tears.

"No," he said, "no one must come between husband and wife. Come now, see! Draw that little chair nearer, and let us talk like friends; remember, I do not demand your confidence."

"I wish to tell you all, your Grace, but you will promise me one thing, and that is, that Madame Malafré shall not know of it, or of anything that I say to you."

"I do not see why that lady should know anything that you say to me. I am not in the habit of betraying my friends, even when there is not the seal of the confessional upon their confidence."

"I do not know where to begin, your Grace," said Valencia. "In the first place, they say, Madame Malafré and Aristo—that is, my husband, that I have no right to wear the clothes that I have. And my rings, they would like to take them all away. That is, Madame Malafré would; Aristodème, I think, would not have noticed them at all, if she had not called his attention to me."

"Where did you obtain these clothes which your friends think too fine for you, and the jewels as well? Is that a part of your confession? Is it too much to ask?"

"Oh, no, not at all. I shall love to tell your Grace all about it, me! You see, your Grace, it was this way," drawing her low chair close to him, and leaning confidingly on the arm of his: "I have a friend. He is a young Englishman. The first thing I did was to keep it a secret from them all that I knew him, this young Englishman. My heart jumped for joy when I heard his name. I dressed the table entirely for him, as if no one else would be present. I cut all my best flowers. I gave to him the choicest rose that I have had in the six months that I have been at Salvaresse. I ordered the best of everything; Radegonde always makes a bruit about the boning of the duck, but her complaints were not to stand in the way on that day, your Grace. He had the finest glass, the thinnest, and clearest. He had the oldest spoon, that of Honoré d'Alêne, the robber knight. We always give that to the most honored. You had it yourself to-day, your Grace. When I had given him the prettiest plates, the softest napkin, I went up to my room to find a dress to charm him."

"When had you seen him last?" asked the Archbishop, dryly.

"When I was seven years old, your Grace. Beel, I think, was a little older. Perhaps he had eleven years, perhaps twelve. I had never seen him since that far away day, but it was a little bit of my childhood, my jeunesse, my long ago. Do you understand, your Grace?"

"Yes," answered the Archbishop, sighing softly, "I understand."

"I had nothing only a terrible old pink cotton gown, your Grace. Phigie, that is, my belle-sœur, had a lovely lace gown from Raudnitz; Madame Malafré had a shoulder-cape all of ruffles from Pacquin; for me, I had nothing. Aristodème, that is, my husband, he said it did not matter, your Grace, but it mattered much to me."

The Archbishop smiled behind his hand. "The eternal feminine!" he whispered to himself, "the eternal feminine!"

"He was here in the summer," ventured Valencia, "and I asked him when he went to Paris to get me some dresses and some rings."

The Archbishop sat up in his chair and stared at the girl by his side. "You asked a young man, a stranger, to procure for you dresses and rings in Paris?"

"And was there any harm in it, your Grace? How else could I get them? I had known him when we were little things. His father was a friend of my father's."

"I hardly think that any young French girl would be guilty of that, my dear; but let me hear more. You Americans and English are so emancipated. I have some English and American friends, and I must confess that they always astonish me. Well, go on."

"I did not dare to let the family know about the matter, your Grace, and the worst of it is that I had them sent to Roxane, our blanchisseuse. She used to bring them to me. Then Madame Malafré found out that there was something wrong, she bribed Roxane to tell her, and that is how they know, she and Aristo—I mean my husband."

"Where were you brought up?" said the Archbishop, leaning back and turning his eyes fully upon her. "Where have you lived?"

His tone was cold, not as it had been but a few moments since.

Valencia began to tremble. "All over the world, your Grace."

"Ah!" said he, "American ways are lax, lax."

"I have never been in America, your Grace; I was born here. I have had no mother——"

"Ah! that is it, no mother. A mother would have taught you."

"My father took me to Italy, to Spain, to Egypt, to many places, but when he went back to America to see his mines he left me at the convent."

"The sisters do not practise nor counsel deception, my child."

Valencia's tears were dropping again. The Archbishop had changed his tone. He was no longer her friend. He thought her as wicked as all the rest.

"And how came this young man to offer to buy you these things? What had you done for him? What obligation was he under, to spend his money for you?"

"His money! Your Grace! It was not his money, it was mine."

"Ah, yours! That puts a different face on the matter. Yours, you say? Then why all this secrecy?"

"I—I was afraid it would be taken from me, your Grace."

"Who could or would take your money from you, child?"

Valencia had arisen. She drew away from him and stood looking down. "I—I—was afraid she—she would persuade him, your Grace. I—I—think that Aristo—my husband would not have had such hard thoughts of me if—if—she——"

"She? Oh, you mean——"

"Madame Malafré."

"I suppose she is particular as to what young girls do. She is probably strict as regards morals—" Valencia said nothing. Her eyes were fixed on the floor. "Why should your husband take your money? He must certainly have known what you were possessed of. He must have given it to you himself. Why then should you not ask him to buy your clothes, instead of asking this strange young man?"

"Beel was not a strange young man, your Grace. We were friends, as I have said, in the old days——"

"Ah, a love-affair!" He shook his head. "Worse and worse." The Archbishop now looked very stern indeed.

"Not a love-affair, your Grace. Beel does not care for me. We were children together. Did I not say I had not seen him since Bordighera? When I leaned against him, as I used to do when we were little, he ordered me away. 'Back,' he would say, 'back, Valencia, you annoy me.'"

"And very rightly."

"He said that it was not proper; that the people of the world did not act so, not unmarried girls with young men."

"And very right of him, an estimable young man. Eh bien! Well, what else happened?"

"Nothing," said Valencia; "that is all."

"And your husband objected to your spending his money? Then you should not have spent it."

"But it was not his money, your Grace. It was mine, my very own. See, I will show you a little bit of paper that my father wrote for me before he died."

She unfastened the tiny watch which Hamptdon had sent, opened the case at the back, and took therefrom a small scrap of paper. "Can you read the English, your Grace?" "No, not very well; and this has been rubbed so badly." "I have cried over it so much." Valencia gave a long sigh. "I am so tired crying, your Grace. It seems that I have shed enough tears for a very old woman——"

The Archbishop took the paper within his hands and bent his head to read it. With difficulty he made out the almost indiscernible scrawl—"For my little Valencia, to do with as she will." "Yes," he said, at last, "it certainly seems as if it were your own. And why did your father give you what he could not confide to your husband?"

"He did not know that I would marry, when he died, dear Archbishop. He had gone away, only for a little while. Then my Uncle Lonsdale came to me and said that my dear father was dead, that I had no money, that a kind gentleman, the Count d'Alêne, would take me for his wife, if I wanted to leave the convent. I was tired of the sisters." The Archbishop raised his eyebrows at the frank confession. "I love the world, I wished to go. I thought it very kind of the Count d'Alêne. I did not know that he expected to find an heiress in me. I did not know that my Uncle Lonsdale had handed to him a quantity of worthless securities. I did not know that the mines had failed."

"All of them?"

"All of them, your Grace. So my Uncle Lonsdale told me. Imagine how my husband must have felt when he found that he must always keep me, always feed me, a

great growing girl, and that I had only enough for my bread and butter, nothing more, me!"

"And when did he find this out?"

"Only after my Uncle Lonsdale went to America. Then he wrote to me and I showed the letter to Aristodème, I mean the Count."

"And when you told him——"

"He became very pale and nearly fainted, and, your Grace, I was sorry for him. Had he waited for only three days, he could have married Madame Malafré, the widow of the jeweller of the Rue de la Paix."

"And why should he wish to marry Madame Malafré?"

Valencia looked at the Archbishop as if he were asking a question the answer to which the whole world knew. "They had been lovers years ago, your Grace. He has never recovered. He waited for me to grow, and then when I grew I had no money. Think how much happier he might have been, and now here am I in the way."

"Hush, child, you must not talk so. You are his wife, he is your husband. As such, you must remain until God frees one or the other."

"I had heard that they were going to turn me out. That she would try to separate us. That they would appeal to your Grace, or even to the Pope."

"Do not fear, child; that cannot be. Simple minds they must have! Do not fear. But there is still something that you have not told me. If your father had failed, how comes it that the money was given? If the money was yours with which you bought the clothes and the jewels"—the Archbishop took in with a comprehensive and appreciative glance the charmingly dressed

creature before him—"if the money was yours, why did you hide it from the Count?"

"It—it—was not exactly money, your Grace. It—was——"

"Yes, go on."

"It was a pearl necklace."

"A pearl necklace! and so you disposed of it?"

"Or some of it, your Grace."

"It must have been a very handsome necklace to buy all these beautiful things that you have."

"Oh, your Grace, it is beautiful, but I have sent away only seven pearls in all as yet. I have all the rest. It was worth, with those seven pearls, five hundred thousand francs."

The Archbishop took his hand from before his face and sat upright.

"Five hundred thousand francs! Five hundred thousand francs!" he said. "And did this young man, this young Englishman, give you that?" Evidently the Archbishop had not clearly understood her vehement rush of words. "There must be something very wrong indeed. Five—hundred—thousand——"

"Ah! Your Grace, you forget what I have told you. They have poisoned you against me. Do you think me capable of that, even if poor Beel had so much money in the world? He is only a poor architect. My father left the necklace in the care of his father, Lord Barrington. When he was dead, he—Beel, I mean—brought it to me."

"And you sold some of the pearls. Is that all?"

"That is all, your Grace."

He held out his hand to her. "You should have told your husband," he said.

Valencia shook her head. "Then she would know."

"I think you had better confess all to him, and make him promise not to tell. It is your secret."

"A promise is nothing to her, your Grace. She will worm it out of him, and then she will make him take the necklace from me and give it to her. She knows the value of jewels, she! She understands such things, she! She has been the wife of a jeweller, she! She has no right to my necklace, your Grace. That you know, and as certainly as I tell my husband, I shall own it no longer."

The Archbishop arose. "I will think this matter over," he said. "It seems to be somewhat complicated. And now, my child, I must beg your pardon for the doubt I had of you. Why did not you tell me in the first instance that the pearls had been left you by your father? Then I should the sooner have understood."

"And you will not tell them out there?"

"Not at present. And the Marquis!" He wheeled about, with the lively interest of a younger man. "Why is he here—can you tell me that?"

"He came for the hunting, but, as we know down here, there is no hunting. I wish he would go away," said Valencia, looking down. "I wish that you could persuade him to go away, your Grace."

"I know of the Marquis in Paris," said the Archbishop. "Certainly, Paris is much better suited to such as he than this dove-cote. And, now, dear child, I have a message for you. Mrs. Quentin asks that you will come to Paris and pay her a visit. If you say yes, she will write you a letter setting the time."

"To Paris! To Paris!" Valencia was breathless. All

at once her eyes were sparkling, her heart beating wildly. "Does Aristo—does my husband know?"

"I gave him Mrs. Quentin's note. If all proved satisfactory, I was to tell her, and she would write at once setting the date."

"Ah, your Grace. Has all proved satisfactory?"

"Thus far," said the Archbishop, smiling; "what I shall counsel further, I must think over by myself." There was a low knock at the door. It was the Count. As he came in, Valencia made her swift escape.

"And what of the child, your Grace? Is there anything wrong—anything that reflects on my honor, the honor of my house?"

The Archbishop laid his hand on the old man's shoulder and looked down into his face. "I wish," said he, "that we were all as innocent as that white little soul who has just left us. Were there no guile worse than hers in the world, we might expect the millenium to-morrow."

"And what did she confess to your Grace?"

"If I tell you, it must go no farther. That you must promise faithfully, Count," said the Archbishop, with a very determined look in his eye.

The Count turned his head sidewise; he wavered and trembled. He knew that Madame Malafré was waiting for him just beyond the library door, eager to pounce upon him and pluck the secret from his breast. As well promise that the rain of the winter's storm should not beat on the towers of Salvaresse as that she should not learn all that had been confided to him.

"I—I think I had better say that you need not tell me, your Grace. You are sure that you are satisfied?"

"Absolutely, Count. Absolutely."

As the Archbishop left, he turned to the Count. They were for the moment alone. "You have an innocent soul within your keeping, my friend," he said. "God will require it of you as innocently pure as when he gave it to you. Be careful how you fulfil your trust."

And this was the upshot! The Count trembled with misery. Valencia acquitted, and he blamed—and, if he, then Madame Malafré also. Of what use asking the Archbishop to Salvaresse if the tables were to be turned upon him in that manner?

The Archbishop was not quite satisfied with himself as he travelled back to Paris. He sat and thought of the astounding revelations of this young girl, that she had been the beneficiary of her father to the extent of five hundred thousand francs, and the fortune—a fortune even in these modern days—contained in a necklace of pearls. "The one mistake that I made," mused the Archbishop, "was not to ask her in whose custody she had placed this wonderful necklace, whether it is in safe keeping. It would be a great temptation to anyone, especially a young man like her English friend. God forgive me if I do him injustice. When I see her again, I must be somewhat more inquisitive—for her sake."

CHAPTER XII

AND now in some mysterious way the Marquis found himself no longer *persona grata* at the château. Was it that the Archbishop had had a quiet talk with the old Count, and had shown him that which he should have seen for himself? Valencia, tired of his fervid compliments, his passionate love-making in secret, kept very much to her own room now; and, as the Marquis had not come to Salvaresse as companion for either the Count or Madame Malafré, he found it convenient to take his departure. The roads were wet or frosty, as the case might be. Valencia had accepted no invitation to ride since the Archbishop had gone away. Was it because of something that he had said which suddenly opened her childish eyes to the impropriety, if not the danger, of her close acquaintance with de Vallée?

"I know of the Marquis. Certainly, Paris is much more suited to him than this dove-cote." The words came back to her. They spoke plainly of the Archbishop's disapproval of her intimacy with de Vallée. Therefore she kept to her room, and as a cause of this determination the Marquis took his departure—hunters, bulldogs, hunting-dogs, and groom.

One morning Valencia and the Count were sitting cowering over the fire. The Marquis had been gone about a week, and life was indeed dull. Madame Malafré was spending a few days at her own house, and they

were quite alone. A messenger came up the hill, and to the door of the kitchen; he held in his hand an envelope. Letters were seldom received at Salvaresse, and a telegram more seldom. It always frightened the family extremely when one was brought from d'Arcy-Renaud. This time proved no exception. Valencia trembled as Radegonde brought in the blue paper, and the Count's hands shook as he took the envelope from the old woman.

"It does not look like Edmond's writing," said he; "neither is it Phigie's." He laid it upon the table. "I cannot open it now, Valencia," he said. "I feel a premonition. Let it lie there awhile."

"But the messenger asks if there is any answer, Monsieur le Comte. He will take it with him if there is."

Valencia took a paper-knife from the table, and ran it under the flap of the envelope.

"You must not open my messages," said Count Aristodème, faintly.

"It must be read," said Valencia, firmly. "I shall not read it. It will be no easier to bear an hour from now." She spread out the paper without looking at it, and handed it to the Count.

He but glanced at it, when he fell back in his chair. "Phigie is dead!" he said, faintly. "Our Phigie is dead."

"Oh, no! no! no! Aristodème; you do not read aright." Valencia tore the paper from his hands. She ran to the window, and held it close to the pane.

"No! no! no!" she cried. But yes, yes, yes. These were the fatal words: "Countess Edmond is dead." "Who could have sent it, Aristodème? Who— There is no signature——"

"But Edmond, of course," he whimpered, feebly.

"We will go at once, dear Aristodème. I will go. At once, Radegonde, at once! O Phigie! Phigie!"

Count Aristodème made no suggestion. He sat doubled up in his chair, his cap fallen from his head, his face blanched. Who would have thought the cessation of a calm, colorless life like that of Iphigénie could have caused such misery?

"Radegonde, do you hear?" whispered Valencia to the stunned messenger of bad tidings. "The Countess Edmond is dead in Paris. The Count must go at once. I must go with him. We must be with the Count Edmond in his sorrow. Get our things ready. You must put in my black school-dress; I have no other. Oh, Phigie! dear, sweet Phigie!"

"You cannot go, child; I must go alone. We—we—cannot afford it."

"Dear Aristodème, I can afford it. See! I have money, or something that can be made into money. Get us ready, Radegonde! Stay! I will write the answer. Is the man still there? Yes! Then give him this." She felt in her husband's pocket and, notwithstanding his protests, took therefrom a franc. "Listen! give me a paper, or ask him for a blank. So, I will write it. I will sign your name, Aristodème. I shall say that we will come. We can start by the afternoon train. See to everything, Radegonde."

Radegonde was wailing loudly. "The only one of them that was any good, and now gone like that!" She snapped her fingers in air, and threw her apron over her head.

Valencia glanced at the windows upon the side

veranda. They were closed now, and the curtains drawn. It almost seemed as if Phigie must be sitting outside there, knitting, knitting, knitting; and that Edmond was close by her adored side, leaning against the wall, with his orange-colored handkerchief over his head.

Valencia looked back at her husband. "Quick! Radegonde, some cognac; he is faint." She went close to the old man, laid his head upon her shoulder, moistened the lips with brandy, and stroked the thin locks on his temples. His grief touched her deeply. Her pity for him softened her asperity toward him.

"He will never be able to take that journey, Madame," said Radegonde.

"He must go," said Valencia, with streaming eyes. "He must go. There is poor Count Edmond alone. We must both go—both! Arrange his bag and mine, Radegonde; put up some lunch for us. We take the train at three o'clock."

At these words Count Aristodème moved, and spoke faintly.

"Thou canst not go, child. We have not the money."

"I have that which can be made into money, Aristodème; I will get it. Are you well enough to be left?"

Her husband sat up and rested his head upon his hand in an attitude of dejection. The tears dropped in splashes off the end of his nose. "I am well enough to be left," he said, "but it is useless. Where shouldst thou get money?"

For answer, Valencia laid his head back against the chair and ran out of the room. The wind whistled cold as she flew up to the garden. She could take a pearl or two from the strings; they would not be missed. And

what if they were! What if she spoiled the beauty of her splendid ornament? What if she sacrificed the whole of it! Was not Aristodème in trouble? Was not Phigie dead? Must they not, both of them—she and her husband—go at once to her brother-in-law? Of what use were pearls if they were never seen, and could not be converted into money? She rushed to the apple-tree. There was a thin coating of snow on the tree and upon the ground. She thrust her hand into the cavity. Down deep, and deeper it went, and deeper, and stopped at the very end. The hole was empty.

Valencia would not believe this last great disaster. She could not! She could not! Could it be that her fortune, which she had thought would support her her life long, if she spent it carefully, was gone? Swept away in a moment! There must be some mistake! She would not believe it possible! Could Madame Malafré have seen her hide them there? Valencia would believe anything of Madame Malafré. Had she taken them? Again she pushed her hand down, down into that long dark cavity. Ah, yes, she must confess it to herself. The pearls were not there. Who could have taken them! Everyone at Salvaresse was accounted honest. Could Roxane have suspected that she had some source of hidden wealth, and have spied upon her? No, her misery made her unjust! Alas, it also made her forgetful. She had forgotten, for the moment, that Iphigénie was dead and that Aristodème was sitting in there in the breakfast-room nearly fainting; that he must go to Paris—that after he got to Paris he must bring Edmond home; and Phigie, dear Phigie, she must come home, too. Her own trial seemed very trivial compared to this.

With one mournful look at the apple-tree, she turned and went down to the château. She had told no one of the hiding-place of her treasure. No one—yes, one. How sorry he would be, good, dear Veelie, to hear of her loss. For, now that he was away, she remembered nothing but his kindness. She must go back to Aristodème. She must prepare him to go without her. Was she always to be left? It was much harder to be left behind than to go. She was always being left behind. If there was only enough for one, why should not she go? Aristodème was too old to travel alone, and then in a moment Valencia realized that the wish was father to the thought; that it was his place to go to his brother much more than hers, and that she must stay behind.

She must unburden her heart to someone. She flew to the stable—Fêlix was giving the horses their morning meal.

"Félix," exclaimed Valencia, breaking in upon him—her manner wild, her eyes larger than usual—"do you know that I have lost my pearls?"

Félix looked up at the tall girl beside him in a sudden fashion, and screwed up his small eyes. He also screwed up a large mouth as he said, "Does Madame la Comtesse mean those balls of white which she has been dangling in our eyes for some months past?"

"Yes," said Valencia, with a heart-broken sigh, "I mean those, but they are mine no longer—they are gone." A tear stood on Valencia's lashes for a moment, then dropped with a splash into the heart of a rose.

"And why faire du bruit, mais du bruit, about a few strings of pearls? I read in a book of the Count Ed-

mond that the pearl is a disease. I could never bear to see the little Countess wearing them round her neck. It is simply a disease, nothing more, of a shell-fish—the shell-fish live in the water là-bas, a great sheet of water." Félix stretched out his arms and waved them toward the limits of the earth. "A great sheet of water called the sea. Did the Countess think that old Félix knew something of her pearls? Would I wear them? I ask the Countess; and, if not, why should I care for them?" Félix gave two clicks with his tongue within the cavity where a tooth should have been. "I know nothing of the pearls, and I care less."

"You care nothing for my grief, then! I thought you were more kind, Félix. Had you lost all that you possessed in the whole wide world, I should care very much. If you had lost a fortune, that which would protect you from poverty in your old age, I should care, me! They were worth thousands and thousands of francs, Félix." Her hearer gave an awkward start.

"Thousands and thousands of francs," he repeated after her. Then, after a silence of some seconds, he said, "Does the little Countess know where they are, who has them, who went to the apple-tree and stol——"

"Félix! Who told you they were in the apple-tree. I never——"

Félix started and looked away; then said, in a low tone, "The little Countess told me herself."

"I never told you, Félix."

"Not in so many words, perhaps, but are there not other ways of telling? The little Madame has often gone close to the tree, and has felt inside when Félix was there watering; and, if Félix could see, why not the

old one—why not Madame Malafré? A—a—ah, I know well who has the pearls; it is la Vieille, là-bas. The little Countess will never see them again in this world."

Valencia shook her head mournfully. "I cannot believe that she would do such a thing, Félix. I cannot believe that she would commit a theft."

"And so Madame thinks old Félix took the pearls. May the blessed saints forgiv——"

"No, Félix, I never thought you took them; I never knew until now that you knew of my hiding-place, but what am I to think? They are gone. They are worth a fortune, and I—I have nothing."

Valencia stretched out her arms tragically.

"For me, I could never lose a fortune," said Félix.

"And why should you be cared for more than I; why should you——"

"I should never have one to lose, little Madame. No, no! Old Félix has not taken your pearls; he has not seen them, but he knows where they are as well as if he had been by when they were stolen, and that is up there behind the walls of the Maison Malafré."

Valencia ran down the steps and into the house.

"I find I cannot go, Aristodème," she said. "It is you who must take the train at three."

"I feel as if I could not bear the journey, Valencie; I am getting old."

"Oh, yes, Aristodème, you can bear the journey. I will prepare you for it. I will go with you to the station, and telegraph to Phigie's friends to have you met. There was a Monsieur Régence, a banker. He will have you met. I must find his name in the directory at d'Arcy-Renaud. You must go to Edmond. He must need you sadly."

Valencia made all the arrangements for Count Aristodème's departure. She went with him to d'Arcy-Renaud; she saw him on the train. She put his lunch in his hand and asked the guard to see that he was cared for, and then went back and looked out the address of Monsieur Régence, and sent him a message asking him to meet Count d'Alêne, or have him met when the train arrived. She knew nothing of the manner of Phigie's death. She knew only the bare fact. All the way back to Salvaresse she was urging Alceste to go fast. The days were short now, and it was cold and dark. She thought of Phigie all the way, and saw her in fancy sitting on the veranda, as ever, with her knitting.

"I wonder if they allow them to knit in eternity," said she, almost aloud. "It will not be heaven to Phigie without the zephyr and those clicking needles. Ah! could I but hear them click again! Click, click, click—eternally click. I would never complain any more."

When Valencia reached the château there was no one to be seen, but in the little library she found Madame Malafré, her bonnet off, her feet on the fender, her bag on the floor by her side.

"And what is all this?" she cried. "The Count going to Paris and never telling me. He sends me a note at the last moment asking that I come to stay with you until his return, but he tells me nothing of the cause for his sudden departure. Has the bank broken? What is it, in God's name?"

"You are not needed here, Madame," said Valencia, coldly. "I thank you very much, but I am capable of caring for myself. You could not protect me against anything. I have the servants all here. Do not trouble yourself, I beg."

Madame Malafré arose. "I will have my bag sent to the Countess Edmond's room."

"I swear you shall not go there," said Valencia, with sudden courage.

"And where else? The guest-room is full of draughts, the——"

For answer, Valencia flew out of the room and up the stairs. She looked in at Phigie's room as she passed. There was her knitting-bag hanging by the mirror. She had parted with it as a mother parts with her child, but, as Valencia had said, "One cannot knit when one is standing to be fitted." She looked around the room reverently. Phigie was dead! She would never again move across that room with slow and languid steps. She would never again sit up in that bed eating chocolates, and knitting, knitting, knitting. Valencia wafted a kiss to the dim interior, and went out, locking the door. She slipped the key into her pocket, and then walked swiftly to her husband's chamber. If Madame Malafré must remain at the château, there were two places which should not be defiled by her presence, and those were the room of Iphigénie and that of Aristodème. Valencia locked her husband's door, and, going to her own room, she sat down and listened to Madame Malafré's labored rising of the stair. She heard her go along the corridor and try the door of Count Aristodème's chamber, then come back and try that of the Countess Edmond. Finding both closed, she came to the door of Valencia's room, and pushed it open.

"I told you that I would occupy the Countess Edmond's room."

"And I told you that you should not," said Valencia.

"I must. I do not like those other rooms."

"She will want it herself, for the short time she will stay."

"Is she coming home, then?"

"Yes," said Valencia, rising, very pale and stern. "She is coming home. Perhaps to-morrow, perhaps the day after."

"And for only a short time, you say?"

"Yes, yes, yes. O Phigie! Phigie!"

Valencia laid her cheek against the side of the armoire, and burst into a passion of weeping.

"It is well she stays but a short time. A drone in the hive!"

"Stop!" commanded Valencia. "Stop!"

"Why did my friend the Count leave so suddenly? Was it to meet them?"

"Yes," said Valencia.

"He never met them before. Why should he take that trouble now? Can she not come as she often has before?"

"Oh, no, no; never again as she has before. She is dead," wailed Valencia. "She is dead—Iphigénie is dead."

Madame Malafré started at this news, and opened her eyes in astonishment.

"Dead is she, h—m—m—m. You were not fond of her, nor she of you. She tolerated you. She will leave you nothing. Dead, is she? h—m—m!"

"I was fond of her, God knows! She was fond of me, I think. Phigie was not one who said much. She was nearer my age than you others. At the same time, I think she will leave me nothing; why should she?

Though Iphigénie was my sister." Valencia was conscious that she had thought of the relationship now for the first time. "She was my sister—she must have loved me!"

Madame Malafré penetrated within the room. There was silence broken only by the long sobbing sighs of Valencia. Both listened, hearing the heavy tread of Radegonde mount the stair. When she came, she held a letter in his hand. It bore the Paris postmark. It was addressed to the Count d'Alêne.

Madame Malafré stepped forward and held out her hand.

Radegonde passed her by without a word. "It is for Monsieur le Comte," she said. "His wife will open it."

Valencia looked at the superscription. She had never opened one of Aristodème's letters. Letters were almost as rare at the château of Salvaresse as telegrams. She hesitated.

"Open," said Radegonde, in as kind a voice as she could assume; "it may tell us something about our lady —our dear lady."

Valencia broke the seal and read. The letter had been posted very early that morning. It stated that the Countess Edmond had been struck down by a motor-car as she was crossing the Champs Elysées. She spoke only once, those said who raised her up and carried her away. Her words were, "My poor Edmond!"

Count Edmond had not shed a tear. He had not spoken since the accident the day before. He had not slept. He knelt by the side of the bed where lay the unconscious form of his wife, his face buried in the coverlid, crying, "Phigie! Phigie! Phigie!" It was

heartrending to see him. No one could stay in the room.

"What is in that letter?" Madame Malafré demanded.

Valencia turned her red and swollen eyes on the questioner.

"Nothing that concerns you," she said. "It is a letter to my husband."

"Your husband? How much of a husband is he to you? Show me that letter. He would do so himself. He has shown me many a letter which he has kept from you. He is my friend. He was my friend before you were born."

"Then Madame is old enough to know better," broke in Radegonde, insolently. "Had not Madame better go home now? We shall have enough to do to prepare for the funeral."

The funeral! The words struck a chill to the heart of Valencia. The funeral! Must there be a funeral? She had never seen a funeral, except those that she had passed in the streets when they had been taken out to walk by the nuns. Was Phigie to be like that? Shut away from the sun in a black casket, four horses drawing her slowly along, men dressed in black by the side. "O Phigie," she sobbed for the twentieth time. "If you could only come back, I would never even think a complaint any more. You should knit, and knit, and knit. I would walk into d'Arcy-Renaud for the zephyr, and I would not mind it, Phigie; and I would sit and look at you knitting all day and every day, if only—only you could come back——"

"I will take the guest-room," said Madame Malafré. "That is ready, I suppose."

"It is very damp," said Radegonde.

"You can make a fire, I suppose."

"The castor is off the bed, and the window does not close properly."

"Go, Radegonde," said Valencia, "only go! Make the fire. It was Monsieur's wish to have Madame Malafré here. You must carry out his wishes."

With some grumbling, Radegonde went off to carry out these orders, and Valencia closed her door upon her unwelcome guest.

In her trouble, with the tears still wet upon her cheeks, Valencia sought out her old friend and new crony, Félix.

"Félix," she said, "I must ask your advice on an important matter. I do not suppose it is right, but I have no one to ask but you. I have questioned Radegonde as to what is usual, and her only answer is: 'Madame la Comtesse must not burden me with too much responsibility. I will see to the old one—that is all that I am able for.'"

"Meaning la Vieille," interpolated Félix.

Valencia assented by her silence.

"And she can do it, that Radegonde there. She can manage la Vieille, never fear. We may well leave that to her. Now, what is it that the little Countess wishes to ask of old Félix?"

The old man took on an air of great importance, and puffed himself outward as far as his lean figure would allow.

"Do you think it will be best for me to—to see anyone, Félix, before the Count arrives? I have never been placed in such a—such a——"

"But certainly the little Countess must ask old Félix.

He that is the only one to tell her—he who has been the stay of the house of d'Alêne for many years. Those incapables are of no use; oh, of no use at all." He threw a glance of contempt upward toward the kitchen, a glance which was intended to include Alceste, Aimée—even Radegonde herself. "There will be two of them," he added, with an air of conviction—"two of them; I will make all arrangements."

"Two of them? What do you mean, Félix? Two of them?"

Valencia's eyes stared with horror. "Félix, Félix, what do you mean; what do you know? What——"

Félix pulled a wisp of hay from the straggling mass that draggled from overhead, and put it between his teeth.

He looked sidewise at the young Countess, and said: "Does the little Madame think that he can live without her, our Count Edmond? She, who was the only one worth living for in the entire château?"

"O Félix!" exclaimed Valencia, overwhelmed. "The Count Edmond, do you mean? I never thought of that. No, I suppose he cannot live without her."

"What would be the use?" asked Félix. "Who is there at Salvaresse worth living for when she is gone?"

"You are right, Félix," cried Valencia, humbly. "You are right. She was the only one worth living for—the only one of us all, if I except my husband and his brother. And—and—but, Félix, there is much good in Radegonde; Aimée is also kind, when there is need. See how she made the jelly when I had my last cold. Alceste, too, he drives carefully, and he waits very nicely when he is not too tired; and you, yourself, Félix, are a very

useful person—but she was, as you say, our dear Countess Edmond, much superior to all others about the château."

Félix chewed his straw ruminatively. "The dead are always in the right," he said. "For that reason it would be pleasant to be dead, just for a little while; I that was never right in my life, no matter what I do. I have often wondered what sentences they would carve on my tombstone if it were left to them, those incapables; for, of course, the old Count could not trouble himself with such as me. Ah! the little Countess must not think that old Félix will not have a stone at his head, and a fine one; he who has saved money enough to pay that robber Cranache, twice over, for the very finest one that money can buy—of him," corrected Félix, suspecting that purchases of such a nature were rather dear in the vicinity of Paris. "I have my inscription already written. I will show it to the little Countess some day, if it will give her pleasure. I hide it in the halter-room, behind the locker, for fear that those incapables, who never had a religious thought, will discover it and make the sport of me. I think I can repeat it without the paper. It runs something like this." Félix looked around him for an audience. Cleopatra turned her old head about, and whinnied; Francis the First rubbed his nose on the neck of Cleopatra. Valencia stood by the stable-door, and gazed on Félix, open-mouthed.

"'Here lies one,'" began Félix, "'who was without reproach and without fear. Here lies one who possessed the greatest courage. Here lies one who was the unequalled master of all the horse-flesh upon the estate of Salvaresse.'"

"Horse-flesh?" said Valencia. "Oh, yes, I see; you mean Cleopatre and François Premier."

Félix took a long breath and repeated himself to get a fresh start. "'Who was the unequalled master of all the horse-flesh on the estate of Salvaresse. In his youth he fought several duels, and resided with a duke of royal blood, and always killed his man. He travelled the wide world over. He hunted in the Alps and the Pyrenees. He shot many a wild boar in his time, and has been known to return from the chase clothed in the skin of a mountain-lion.'" Why these statements should redound to the honor of the future departed, Valencia, with her limited knowledge, could not be expected to fathom. She gazed upon Félix open-mouthed, and waited.

Félix took breath after proclaiming these virtues, and began again.

"'Honored by his king. Thrice offered the——'"

"By what king, Félix?"

"'Honored by his king,'" resumed Félix. "'Thrice offered the position of——'"

"I should much like to know what king, Félix. Will you not tell me? We have not had a king here in France in my day, but you are very old, Félix; perhaps you—Tell me what king, Félix."

"What matter does it make to the little Countess which king honored old Félix?"

He drew a long breath, and continued:

"'Honored by his king—thrice offered the position of juge de paix——'"

"Félix!"

"'He lived a life of sanctity and charity, and died lamented by the poor and beloved by all.'" Félix looked around in triumph at his three auditors.

"And what do you say to that? Could any of them

compose a better epitaph? 'Offered four times the directorship of the public baths'—that is a part which I forgot. I am not one who holds much with the use of water," interpolated Félix, "though I take the bath annually, on the fête day of my saint; it always gives me a chill from which I do not recover for days—but what would you have? We must make these concessions to religion."

François Premier, who was looking round sidewise as far as his halter would allow, nodded a very accentuated admission.

Again Félix puffed himself outward, and prepared to astound his listener with knowledge, of which she was to be the sole recipient, until such time as his virtues should be shrouded from mortal eye.

"'Here lies one who has twice been elected mayor of Chatillon.'"

"Félix!" exclaimed Valencia, "when were you mayor of Chatillon? Was it before I came here?"

"It has not been since," remarked Félix.

"But, tell me, when were you mayor of Chatillon, Félix?"

"That is exactly what they will ask when I am dead," answered Félix, and continued with the epitaph.

"'He was of lofty courage, and his master always placed him above the incapables of the household.' I wonder how those là-bas will like that," said Félix, breaking off and grinning.

"But—but, Félix, you never fought any duels, you never lived with a duke of royal blood, you never travelled, you never—shot, you never——"

"Who can dispute it after I am gone?" argued Félix, turning to his young mistress with a decided air.

"You have said that before, Félix," returned the little Countess, much mystified—"that about the courage, I mean." She seated herself on the great stone horse-block, feeling that the interview promised to be a prolonged one.

"There is no harm in repeating it. It will impress them, as Madame la Comtesse knows. I have left money to pay for those very words. They will have no right to take my money unless they carve those words, and nothing else. Why not my virtues as well as those of the Baron over yonder, the Baron at Saltelle, on whose stone one reads, 'Sans peur, et sans reproche.' I may confess it is from that I obtained my leading sentence—he who ran away with the wife of Monsieur Jailleson over at d'Arcy-Renaud, and who stole the money of his belle-mère. Did I ever run away with the wife of anyone, I ask you?" Receiving no reply, he continued: "Did the little Countess ever see a stone at the head of a grave which did not record the virtues of the dead, and why not those of old Félix as well as another? But there may be some truth in it after all, especially the closing words."

"And what are those?" asked Valencia, smiling and interested, in spite of her flushed cheeks and swollen eyes.

"They are," said Félix, with slow emphasis and with a malicious glance in the direction of the kitchen regions, "'Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.' Let them dispute it who will. Who knows more about it than I myself?"

"It would require a very large stone to record all that," said Valencia.

"That is quite true, but the little Countess need not fear; I have left it in my will that the slab is to be of great height, the reading to run across both sides."

"Will not that be very expensive, Félix?" asked his listener.

"And why do I wear the old culottes if not for some good purpose?—I that could compete with Dobran the miller and Marie's Jean on fête days and Sundays. They make the sport of me, but wait until death seizes them, and then see who will speak a good word for them. They will be buried like the beasts of the field, while I shall have a lasting monument. I have heard such subjects argued out often down at the mill, là-bas; with Marie's Jean, and Roxane, and others. We often argue about religious matters. We discussed a picture once. It was in *Le Monde Illustré*. It was the picture of an angel appearing to the sacred Paul in prison, but the artiste-peintre had left off the wings. Marie's Jean, who is always arguing, remarked: 'And why send such libels here to Salvaresse? Do we not know something of art here, we?' His cousin, the cousin of Marie's Jean, had been the janitor at the atelier Julien, and we have always looked upon him as an authority.

"'Who ever saw an angel without wings?' demanded Marie's Jean.

"But, though I do not pretend to be an artist, rather a critic when I have the opportunity, and a good one at all times, I said with a look at Marie's Jean which put a stop to all discussions: 'And who, pray, wilt thou tell me, Marie's Jean, ever saw an angel with wings? Did you, Marie's Jean?'"

"I never thought of that," said Valencia, "but we are told that in Bible times——"

"The little Countess must pardon my interrupting her," said Félix. "The little Madame can see for herself that an angel with wings would be a monstrosity. That would make a creature with six limbs, the arms two, the legs two, the wings two, and that is not——"

"You must not doubt the Bible stories, Félix," said Valencia, solemnly.

"I suppose it would be wrong, with death in the house," assented Félix. "Very well, then, I will promise the little Countess that I will argue no more at present; but after the burial, when things are as they once were, if I see Madame la Comtesse again, then I will carry my argument to a finish. If the Countess follows the ways of the world, however, she will pay but little attention to old Félix, for she will be the only Countess at the château."

"Félix," said his young mistress, rising, "we must believe in the Bible from the very first word to the very last. Please remember that, and now, after all, you have not told me what I must do. Shall I go to d'Arcy-Renaud, to meet the Count?"

Félix, who was busily murmuring, "'Twice mayor of Chatillon,'" and "'Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven,'" over and over, ceased his whispering to reply. "That would be to show proper respect, and I, too, will be there. I will be there with two corbillards." The chill at Valencia's heart reminded her of that which she had been lured for the moment into forgetting.

"I am quite capable of giving advice on serious subjects—I that have written for myself so expensive an epitaph. I am always right. Have I not given Madame excellent advice about the pearls? They are certainly up

there in the house of the old one. Madame la Comtesse will see one day that old Félix is a true prophet."

Valencia shook her head. "I cannot believe it," she said. "I cannot. She would not dare take my pearls even if she would wish to tease me by hiding some little thing; they are too great a possession to carry away from one. Why! such a theft would place the thief behind iron bars, Félix."

"I should not wish to add that to my epitaph," returned Félix, quickly. "'Once convicted of burglary, placed behind iron bars for the theft of a necklace of pearls worth thousands and thousands of francs—' Oh, no! little Countess, that would never do. I am afraid she will never have it carved upon her tombstone—all the same, she has the pearls, la Vieille there; she, and she alone."

Mention of the tombstone recalled to Valencia the boast of Félix that he had travelled extensively, and she reminded him of what he had said. "You say now that you never saw the sea, Félix, and yet the epitaph says that you have travelled all over the world. One cannot travel all over the world without coming to the ocean."

"I have seen sea enough," said Félix, stolidly. "I have seen the lake of Annecy. That is large enough for anything. I only said that I did not know the sea where the pearls grow; but, after all, I think I may be mistaken. A travelled man like myself has seen all there is to see. I have only forgotten—I have seen so many things. How can I remember all? let me ask you. But we are beside the question. It is the necklace of pearls that the Countess wishes to find, and let me tell her that the place to find them is behind the walls of the Maison Malafré, and nowhere else."

CHAPTER XIII

MADAME MALAFRE, who said that she was ill, breakfasted in her own room on the following day, and Valencia did not see her before leaving to meet the train which arrived late in the afternoon from Paris. All at once the young girl had taken upon her shoulders all the affairs of the château. She arranged the house, she ordered the servants; and, remembering that the Count would not have found his cereal menu along his route, she commanded a fresh supply to be ready for him. She gave the keys of his chamber and that of the Countess Edmond into the hands of Radegonde. "They will need fires built in the calorifère and the salamandre. See that the rooms are well aired, but, no"—she contradicted herself with a pang at the heart—"the Countess will need no fire. Make a fire in Count Edmond's room. Tell Aimée to have some black coffee ready. Not burnt bread-crusts, coffee! They will need warmth and stimulant, and, above all, have everything as neat and bright as possible, for the poor Count Edmond's home-coming. Tell Alceste to bring the carriage round at half after two."

"Will Madame Malafré accompany Madame la Comtesse?" asked Radegonde.

"She will not," answered Valencia.

Having given these orders, Valencia withdrew to the room of the Countess Edmond. She locked the door

and gave herself up to her grief. When it was somewhat spent, she sat, her cheek upon her hand, thinking of what the future would bring to her. Should things come to their worst, there had been always the possibility of an appeal to Iphigénie. She was not conscious of having had this conviction, but now that Phigie was gone, irrevocably gone, she felt as if she had lost a bulwark of defence. Phigie had been kind, if negatively so. Had she not always said, in that sweet drawl of hers, "Take anything of mine, Valonthia, anything of mine," and now that Phigie was here no more, she could possess herself of all those lovely clothes, but the thought gave her no pleasure, only pain and remorse—pain that Phigie was shut away forever from her sight, remorse that she had rebelled against the knitting, the everlasting knitting. Had God been good, He would have allowed Phigie to be knitting still.

She sat there unconscious of the flight of time until there came a knocking at the door. "The carriage is ready, Madame. It is half after two o'clock."

Valencia started and looked around her. Ah! so it had not been imagination, a dream. Perhaps she had fallen asleep. So it was all to come then? She had lived it through once. It had been so real. Could she live it over again? She hurriedly dressed and went down to the back door.

Alceste was seated on the high front cushion. He had a robe wrapped closely around him. Valencia felt rather than saw Radegonde, with a new tenderness, tuck the old green shawl around her knees. Cleopatra and Francis the First started down the hill, rattled the carriage through the archway and along the road; the way

was long, but they drew up at the station just as the train arrived. She alighted and walked with swift and nervous steps, looking here and there for the Count. When she saw him descending from one of the remote carriages, she ran quickly toward him, and it was upon her strong young shoulder that his hand rested as he stepped to the platform. But what was this?—he bore no sign of woe, no badge of mourning. Aristodème was old and forgetful. It should be her part to see that the proprieties were not shocked, those proprieties which he had forgotten in his grief. But again, what was this! Aristodème was smiling, there was a tear in his eye, but tears come from joy as well as from grief.

"It was a mistake," he cried. "Dear little one, it was a mistake. Edmond was almost crazed. When she lay so long unconscious, he thought her dead. He left her side but for a moment, and that was to tell a servant to send that message to Salvaresse. But she is alive, our Phigie. She has spoken. I have seen her for a few moments. I have touched her hand. She sends thee her love. She asked if thou wert there. She seemed sorry when I said thou wert not. Phigie is alive! Phigie is alive!"

"She asked for me? Phigie asked for me? O Aristodème, is it true? She is alive! alive! See then what it is to have a sister. One may think that a sister does not think much of one, but she loves one all the time, is it not so? Only she has not thought of saying so." Valencia took the Count's arm within hers and supported him to the carriage. He leaned against her with confidence.

As they reached the step Félix hobbled up with a tear

on his dirty grizzled cheek. "I will wait and come with them," he said, waving his hand toward the train. "I have ordered the corbillards, two of them, Madame la Comtesse, for we have decided—have we not, Madame la Comtesse?—that he would not live without her. I cannot help much in the lifting. Dans le temps j'étais bien fort, but I am an old man now; we are all old now, we——"

"Félix, Félix!" exclaimed Valencia, interrupting him impatiently, joyously. "She is not dead, my sister is not dead. Tell him, Aristodème, tell Félix that my sister is not dead."

The old Count turned a cheerful face to Félix. His lips trembled, he did not speak, but his look was eloquent. They helped him into the carriage. He seemed so weak and helpless. He had aged years, Valencia thought, since he went away. It was the trip to Paris. It had lasted only a few hours, but a few hours of suspense and dread are equal to a lifetime of lesser woes. Valencia covered him warmly with the old green shawl. Underneath it he sought for and found her warm young hand and held it close. His was as cold as those which she had fancied only an hour ago were still with the cold of death, but there was nothing to mourn for now, Phigie was alive, there was nothing to mourn for.

"I cried all the way to Paris, dear little one, and when I got to the gare and found no one to meet me, I wept still. I thought that Edmond had also left us. Judge then of my feelings, to see him at the door of the Régences when I arrived. Ah! they are kind, those Régences. To be a banker is not to be devoid of all feeling. They treated me as we would one of our own

people; and as for Phigie, she could not be so comfortable here at home. There she has everything, such luxury as only such people can command, and two of the finest physicians in Paris. She has a nurse for the day and a nurse for the night. She sent you something, Valencie, child."

"Phigie sent something to me? My sister sent something to me?" gasped Valencia in wonder. "She thought of me, then, while she was having two of the finest physicians in Paris to attend her, and a trained nurse for day and one for night. My sister must love me then, Aristodème. Do you not think so?"

"Love thee, petite, mais certainement, and why not?"

Count Aristodème was beginning to unbutton his old surtout to seek for the parcel, but Valencia would not allow it, the day was so cold. "Though I will take it before we reach the château, Aristodème," she said, with a sinking at the heart as she remembered that the château held Madame Malafré. When they had arrived at the door and the old man had descended from the ancient vehicle, Valencia drew him within the shelter of the veranda, and thrust her hand deftly within the pocket of his coat.

"She asked Edmond to draw them off," said the Count. "She was not able to use her hand; that is bandaged. They are some of her rings."

Valencia ushered her husband softly up the stairs. He seemed as anxious as she that there should be no stir made about his home-coming. Once inside his own chamber, she closed and locked the door and ministered to him. She drew the great armchair in front of the fire, which Radegonde had kept alight; she gave him bouillon,

feeding him with her own hand, as if he were a child. She soothed him, stroking his thin temples with her soft slim fingers, and so Count Aristodème fell asleep. Valencia went out of the door entering upon the escalier de service, and it was not until the hour of dinner, when Madame Malafré awakened from a prolonged sleep, that she discovered that the Count had arrived some hours before. When at last Valencia went to her own room she opened the little parcel which her husband had brought her. The tiny white box was not new, but inside, in the cotton which lined it, she found six of the turquoise rings which she had so long envied Phigie. "Edmond took them off when her hand was injured," said Count Aristodème, "and she asked me when I came in to take them to you."

"Did she send me her love?" asked Valencia.

"I—I cannot remember whether she sent her love, petite; indeed, I think not; she could not speak much; she was not allowed; she suffered greatly, but with her right hand she pressed mine and said, 'Give them to Valonthia, little Valonthia.'"

"That showed love, do you not think so?" asked Valencia again, "saying 'little Valonthia' like that, when she was suffering, and then the rings, the dear rings."

CHAPTER XIV

IT was the third day after the Count's return. Valencia was ill in bed with a renewal of her cold. Madame Malafré was still in the house, but Valencia had given Radegonde orders that she was not to enter her, Valencia's, room. "I shall get up and put her out, Radegonde," said she, "and then I shall remain in this bed just so much longer."

Count Aristodème slipped into Valencia's room as often as he could do so unobserved. It was during those times when Madame Malafré had gone up to her own house, which she usually visited once a day, for all housekeepers know that a house not inhabited by its mistress is sure not to be of much profit or credit. Count Aristodème seemed now to chafe somewhat under the espionage of Madame Malafré. She was now away and he was in Valencia's room, sitting by her bedside. He sighed loudly several times. The sighs were like sobs. Then, after he had sat silent for a few moments, he said: "We are poor no longer, petite; we may do as we will now." The Count had put on his glasses and was fumbling in his breast pocket.

"And how is that, Aristodème?"

He produced a long yellow envelope and opened it—then he said:

"My distant cousin has died; his will has been pro-

bated. He has left all to Edmond and to me. It is a very good sum."

"And I am also rich with my six turquoise rings." Valencia took them from the little paper box. "I should never have dreamed that I could be so unhappy with all those turquoise rings in my hands, to place as I like upon my fingers. I never thought that being rich would bring so much sorrow," said Valencia. "I would eat crusts if Phigie were well and she and frère aîné were back again. Dear frère aîné."

Count Aristodème began to weep again. "That is what she used to call me," he said. "Frère aîné. And now, petite, thou art all that is left me."

Valencia was tempted to say, "There remains Madame Malafré, Aristodème," but she could not bring herself to utter the words. She only said, "Phigie will soon be herself, dear Aristodème, and then we shall have her back again." It seemed to Valencia that the Count sought her more now than of old; that he avoided the company of Madame Malafré; that he seemed to breathe easier when she was out of the house.

Valencia loaded her fingers down with Phigie's rings. They dropped and fell and tumbled over each other like bunches of berries; she could hardly keep them on, her hands had grown so thin.

"Hand me my wedding-ring, please, Aristodème," she said; "it is in the washstand drawer, behind the soap-box."

"Thy wedding-ring, child! and dost thou not wear thy wedding-ring?"

Valencia hid her head in the pillow. "No, dear Aristodème," she said.

"Is it that it is too large for that little finger?"

"No, no," she repeated, through tears, and with a new courage; "it was not too large. I did not like it, Aristodème, but I do like it now. I will always wear it now." She pushed it on to hold the largest rings in place, and whispered: "Take me away, Aristodème. Take me away. If we have money, we may travel, just you and I alone. Take me away, and quickly. I shall not get well here."

"Thou shalt go, petite," said the Count, laying his hand across her arm. He glanced toward the door and said, in a whisper: "We will go, just thou and I. We shall see what the doctor says. Yes, yes. We will go, and very soon."

"And no one else, Aristodème?"

"Only thou and I, chérie; only thou and I."

"I always loved to count Phigie's rings," said Valencia, holding up her hands. "I used to count them and wish and wish that I could have rings just like these. I once prayed the dear God for thirty-two just like Phigie's. Ah! the price I have had to pay for these! I never knew whether there were thirty-two with this one," holding up a large turquoise set with diamonds, "or thirty-two without it. Did you ever count them, Aristodème?"

"No," returned the Count.

He took the gems and began to drop them from one hand into the other, Valencia talking all the time.

"Whenever I looked at Phigie's pretty, dark hands, as they put the zephyr over the needles and drew the stitch through, I was reminded of a history that my father used to relate. It was when we were at Bordighera.

Dear Bordighera! It was an American history. My mother was an American, my father also. Ah, but those Americans! They are droll."

Count Aristodème smiled his first smile for days. "But thou art an American, too, petite."

"One? Oh, yes! but they are droll all the same. I do not know America, me! And because my mother was a Mademoiselle Rogers" (Valencia said Rogère), "my father was always tracing a pedigree. Why does one trace the pedigree, Aristodème? What is the use of tracing the pedigree?"

"I know not, petite. Mine has always been traced. It was not left for me to do. Long before we were robber knights have we inhabited this château. This was our stronghold. Hast thou not often seen the Marquis Roland in his suit of armor hanging in the north tower?"

"Ah, that ancient Marquis Roland! I have looked at him often and often. Was he a Pilgrim, Aristodème?"

"I think not. He does not look like a Pilgrim, petite. Rather a man-of-arms."

"My father talked ever of the Pilgrims, the Pilgrim Fathers, he called them." Valencia said, "Peelgreem Fatheres." She spoke French always except with Hamptdon, but the words Pilgrim Fathers were spoken in English. "What are those Peelgreems, Aristodème?"

"They were those who went to the Holy Land. I know of no others."

"Mademoiselle Rogère—that was my mother—she was

of the Peelgreems. Did she go to the Holy Land? What do you think?"

"Je ne sais qu'en penser, petite."

"Could the Rogère have gone to the Holy Land?"

"Je n'en crois pas un mot, but I sink ze Rogère vent not to ze 'oly Land," returned the Count, venturing timidly upon the thin ice of long-unspoken English.

"The Monsieur Rogère, the first of the family of my mother, was burned at the stake. Ceindré, Aristodème."

"Do they do those things in America?"

"For me, I do not know; but I think it was done in England."

"Ah! En Angleterre," remarked the Count. "Ils sont capable de tout, là-bas."

"I should think so, Aristodème. They burned him, ce pauvre homme, and he possessed nine small children, and one at the breast. I have always remembered that. Nine small children and one at the breast. I thought of it when I used to wish to count Phigie's rings."

"And where was the Madame Rogère?" questioned Count Aristodème, smiling again.

"That I do not know. I know only that it was never certain to me whether ce Monsieur Rogère là was possessed of nine infants or of ten. One is left in much doubt. So was I always in doubt as to the number of Phigie's rings."

"I think there were thirty-two, exactement, with the large one," said Count Aristodème, putting the shining blue berries again into her hand.

"Dear, dear Phigie!" Valencia lay quiet, slipping the rings on and off her fingers, and changing them about as pleased her. She sighed a great many times.

"Thirty-two rings," she said. "I used to wish for thirty-two rings to compete with Phigie. Now that wish has flown with all the rest."

"We can count them when our Phigie returns to us," answered Count Aristodème, smiling down at her, "but we shall never know the truth regarding les enfants de ce pauvre Rogère, là-bas, n'est-ce pas, petite?"

CHAPTER XV

AS Valencia recovered she found the château at Salvaresse a very dull place. The bright anticipations which had been hers when her husband had sat by her bedside had again flown. The Marquis, who had so hastily departed at the first sign of Valencia's seclusion, had left a very large gap in the home life of the château. He had gone away, and with him his horses and his boole-dogues, his saddles, harnesses, and grooms. Valencia heard no more the familiar "Heetch up" with which he ordered Gaston to saddle the mare for her. She missed her rides—she missed everything. She missed Iphigénie, and frère aîné, and Hamptdon. Her life at this period seemed one great blank. There was nothing in it. She did not miss Madame Malafré, because that lady had no intention of being missed. She would not take her departure. She seemed now, in fact, to be a fixture at Salvaresse. Valencia's sadness caused her to become inert; lassitude seemed to take possession of her. She felt at the early age of seventeen and a half that she had nothing to live for. Her lovely necklace was gone. It had vanished like the dew of the morning. She should never see it again; of that she felt quite sure. That one remembrance of her father—that sole insurance against poverty and dependence, with everything that was of the least account—had vanished out of her life.

She wondered sometimes, almost idly, why she had heard no more of Mrs. Quentin's invitation. She had said that she would write—so the Archbishop had told her—write and fix the date. Ah, had she forgotten her? Had Gartha Valery forgotten her also? She had looked forward so joyously to that visit, and nothing had come of it. She had wondered if the clothes she possessed would suffice for a stay with such luxurious people. Gartha Valery had a father who lavished upon her everything that could be bought. She had shown Valencia two diamond rings, which she said that her father had given her in secret. She felt sure that her aunt, Mrs. Quentin, would say that it was wrong, and out of place for so young a girl to wear them.

"They are not of much comfort to me," Gartha had said. "But then, I know I have them, and they are mine. No one can take them from me."

"Much of my way of thinking," mused Valencia.

How lonely the château was. Ah! If she could only see Phigie sitting on the veranda knitting, knitting, knitting! But, no; she would not sit on the veranda in this weather. Well, then, the library or the salon. That would be something. Or to hear her call "Valonthia, Valonthia!" in her negative, sweet voice. Well, of what use to think of all this? Phigie was gone. Would she ever return? She had no friends any more. She wondered why. Now that she was well again, her husband seldom spoke to her. Their confidence seemed a thing of the past. Again he was completely under the dominion of Madame Malafré, who had taken up her abode at Salvaresse—only that for the sake of appearances she visited Maison Malafré occasionally, to give orders to her

servants. But in the last two days she had slipped, in coming down from her house, through Valencia's garden—"How I wish it had been in going up!" sighed the girl to herself—and had twisted, or said she had twisted, her ankle. And so she was a permanent fixture at the château for the present. She seemed, however, quite able to get about the house and up the stairs; in fact, to do anything that she wished.

Valencia became very weary of seeing the two, Count Aristodème and Madame Malafré, always together. She was left entirely to her own devices. Her loneliness became almost crushing. She spent much time in her own room doing very little, if anything. Sometimes she went into Phigie's room and procured some of her colorless little books and read them one by one. Sometimes she took from the library below stairs that glowing bit of history, the "Lives of the Saints," and thus learned to know something of the wickedness of this very wicked world. Sometimes she tried to make little sketches of the valley, and the distant spires of the cathedral, at d'Arcy-Renaud. Sometimes she went into the chilly salon, where there was never any fire, and opened the little old spinet which had been Count Aristodème's mother's, and tried to pick out a simple air for herself on the cold keys. There was a picture of the Mother of Christ above the spinet, and at times she would kneel by the piano-stool, clasp her cold red hands, and raise them toward this lovely presentment of all that is tender in motherhood. She was, as she had told Hamptdon, a Protestant. She hardly knew what this meant except that she was not a Catholic.

"If those in there are Catholics," she would say to herself, "then I would wish to be anything else in the

world," and then would come to her the remembrance of the Archbishop. He was a Catholic. He believed in the Mother of God. This thought would encourage her to kneel and lift her hands beseechingly, close her streaming eyes, and pray, "O Mary Mother, help me, help me, a lonely girl, who has not a friend in the world." After this she felt comforted, and would arise and go on with her little practice.

This practice would be often a vocal one—a little hymn or religious song which she had learned in one of her many sojourns with the sisters. Sung to a sweet, pathetic air, it soothed her heart and made her feel that someone, somewhere, was listening, and that she was not quite alone in the world. The song ran:

> "Je la verrai cette mère chérie.
> Ce doux espoir fait palpiter mon cœur.
> Elle est si bonne et si tendre, Marie,
> Qu'un seul, regard ferait tout mon bonheur.
> Divine Marie, j'ai l'espoir,
> Au ciel, ma patrie, de Te voir."

Usually, as she was finishing in her uncultivated child's voice,

> "Di-vi-ne Mar-i-e, j'ai l'espoir
> Au ciel, ma pat-ri-e, de Te voir,"

there would come a knock at the door of the salon. When opened, it might prove to be Radegonde—it might be Alceste. If Radegonde, the words would be: "The old one in there says she has a headache, Madame la Comtesse; that the noise disturbs her. For me, should she reprove me, I would thump excessivement except for

fear that I would break the strings, and not be able to thump more."

If Alceste were sent, he would say squeakily: "The Madame Malafré desires that the Countess should stop this bruit. Her head is aching badly. For me, I would throw the spinet at her head, and see if that would not cure her."

Valencia used to watch and watch for the postman, that seldom seen functionary at Salvaresse. She stood at her window many a sad quarter-hour gazing wistfully down the valley. It became a habit with her not to expect him; at the same time, she looked for him.

One day, in standing thus, she saw someone emerge from the side path and enter the house. Ah! it was the letter-carrier at last. He had come up the other way. She flew to the door; she flew down the stairs. She entered the library unceremoniously. Madame Malafré was standing by the fireplace reading a letter. Her hand slid over the address as she heard Valencia enter, but Valencia saw that the post-mark was that of Paris. As she came near, Madame Malafré hurriedly threw the envelope into the fire. Valencia, regardless of the glowing coals, stooped, thrust her hand almost into the flame, and rescued the paper at the risk of burning her fingers severely. Much of it was charred, but enough remained for her to see that the letter had not been addressed to Madame Malafré. She laid the envelope on the table, and smoothed it out before the eyes of the Count.

"——tesse d'Alêne," she read. "When have you taken upon yourself the title of Countess Alêne, Madame Malafré?" she asked.

The accused woman turned, her eyes ablaze with anger.

"You think I have taken a letter of yours! There was another Countess d'Alêne before you, not so long since—the Count's mother. It might have been for her."

"And would you have the right to open her letters any more than mine, Madame?"

"Aristodème," Madame Malafré turned to the Count; "am I to bear these insults? The girl accuses me of opening a letter addressed to her. Might it not be addressed to me in the care of the Countess d'Aléne?"

"Not in care of the Countess d'Alêne," said Valencia, shaking her head slowly. "I that never saw my belle-mère—still, I know that she was a lovely woman. She, my belle-mère, is living in a land, Madame, where you will never find foothold."

Suddenly she sprang forward, and, before Madame Malafré could prevent, Valencia had snatched from her hand a part of the letter which she still held. She succeeded in getting only a small portion of it, but that small portion told her that which she had been longing to know. The letter was signed "Alixe Quentin."

As she stood looking at the strip in her hand, Madame Malafré thrust the remainder of the sheet down within the bed of coals, and it was ashes in a moment.

"So you correspond with Mrs. Quentin, Madame. Since when, pray?"

"Valencie!" It was the Count. He had arisen from his apathy and had turned on the combatants.

"That letter was mine, Aristodème. It was mine. I know that Mrs. Quentin has invited me to Paris. The

Archbishop has told me so. This is a letter asking why I do not come—why I do not reply. That I know. Madame, do not think that I cannot discover the truth. The postman will know to whom that letter was addressed. It is a serious thing to open another person's letter, I have heard. We shall see if this thing will be allowed by the authorities."

The Count looked to his ruler for orders, and then turned on the girl.

"Valencie, silence! To dare accuse Madame Malafré of such a thing as reading or breaking the seal of another person's letters!"

She turned and faced him. "Even if my husband allows this outrage, I shall put a stop to it. I shall write to the Quentin. I shall ask if they have written me. I shall go to d'Arcy-Renaud; I shall——"

"The girl is mad, mon ami," said Madame Malafré, turning indignant looks on the Count. "She is mad, to accuse me of such a thing. She should go to a Maison de Santé. I have thought this for a long time past."

"We shall see if you are strong enough to put me there, Madame," said Valencia, drawing herself up to her full height, and looking scornfully at her. Madame Malafré's angry stare was as if she would tear the girl in pieces. Valencia coughed painfully. "I go to d'Arcy-Renaud to the bureau de poste to-day." The Count turned uneasily in his chair, as if he thought that perhaps the matter had gone far enough.

"You must not go out, Valencie. You have a cough. Such things progress rapidly."

"And would not that be a relief to Madame Malafré here, to have it progress rapidly? What else is there

for me!. I am in prison here. Edmond is gone; Phigie, my dear Phigie, is gone. Beel is gone, and Veelie, and the dear Archbishop. The Quentin and Gartha Valery are gone, and Madame Malafré is here. Could life be more desolate, I ask you, Aristodème?"

Count Aristodème started as if to speak, but Madame Malafré, seeing perhaps a kind intention in his eye, interrupted him. "If a woman is not content in her husband's house, where will she be content? I have long thought that you wished to go to someone else, my young Madame, probably to——"

Valencia raised her hand and started forward as if she would strike her tormentor, then it dropped at her side; she sank on her knees beside the Count, and burst out into a fit of crying and coughing, her head upon his knee. "O Aristodème, Aristodème, send her away," she cried. "Send her away; we were happy, so happy before she came." It seemed to Valencia now that her old life had been a happy one, and indeed it had been by contrast—one of the blessings which brighten as they leave us. "I—I—cannot bear it, Aristodème. I cannot, I cannot."

The Count looked greatly distressed. He moved his hand as if to lay it on her bent head, but Madame Malafré spoke, and he withdrew it.

"You are exciting him too much," said she. "He will die if you go on. He has had sorrow of late. It has aged him. Here, my friend, come, lean on me. If this girl persists in making thee miserable, I will protect thee from her wild talk."

She put her arm around the weak old man, almost lifted him from his chair, and dragged him away from the vicinity of Valencia.

The girl would not give him up so; she clung to his knees. "Do not desert me, Aristodème," she cried. "Dear Aristodème, I have no friend but you."

"Can you expect him to be your friend, when you insult his oldest and best? When you treat him to such scenes as these?" said Madame Malafré. "Come, mon ami, lean on me. Unhand him; you will throw him to the floor."

She drew him away, but Valencia clung to the skirts of his coat, dragging after him on her knees, calling: "Aristodème, Aristodème, you are my husband; you promised to protect me. Will you let this woman come between us?" At these wild words the Count staggered, and would have fallen but for Madame Malafré's protecting arm. He burst into hysterical sobbing. "There! See what you have done!" exclaimed Madame Malafré. She unclasped the girl's hands and threw her backward on the floor, where she lay as if stunned; and then, with soothing words, led the old man from the room.

Valencia lay upon the floor in front of the fire, thinking. She sobbed and coughed at intervals. After a half-hour she arose and went slowly to her room. Here she bathed her face and brushed her dishevelled hair. Then she dressed herself in the brown suit and fur collar in which she had taken such pride on that first happy day. She took from the armoire her toque and muff, put on her gloves, and ran down the stairs, and started on the road to d'Arcy-Renaud. It was growing dark as she passed quickly down the road, but so bent was she on her errand to the post-office that she thought not of the lowering weather. It was the walk of an hour to d'Arcy-Renaud, and, by the time she arrived there, the lamps

were lighted in the streets, and it was beginning to rain. The office was quite at the other end of the town, but she walked briskly, and reached there just after the mail had been distributed. The waiting people had all received their letters, and the office was well cleared. She asked to see the maître de poste. He came at once, having been told that the little Countess from Salvaresse was waiting to see him.

"I wish to ask if you sent a letter to me to-day to Salvaresse, monsieur, bearing the Paris postmark."

The maître de poste smiled. "I—I—do not recall," he said; "we send out many letters, as Madame la Comtesse must know."

"Is there no one who could tell me, monsieur? Someone has taken my letter, and I have come to say that in the future letters for me must be delivered only into my hands."

The maître de poste raised his eyebrows. This was an unheard-of thing. Was that the sort of household they kept at Salvaresse? He had heard rumors. He had heard——

Valencia interrupted his thoughts. "Is there no one who would know?"

"If it was a special letter, yes; but if not——"

A clerk standing behind a grating, who had been fascinated by the appearance of the Countess, made bold to say: "If Monsieur allow, I should like to say that a letter did go to Madame la Comtesse this afternoon. It was a special letter, and bore the Paris postmark."

"Ah, I knew it," said Valencia. "And what is done to persons who take the letters of others?—Who read them, and burn them, and never let the person to whom they are addressed even know what is in them?"

"Ah, Madame la Comtesse, that is a very serious affair, as Madame la Comtesse must know. If it is the truth, Madame la Comtesse should go and make a complaint before the commissaire de police."

"Thank you. That is all that I wished to know. The letter was addressed to me, you say. Bon jour, monsieur." The young clerk bowed, thrilled with a vision and a voice that he never forgot until his dying day. Valencia turned away.

"Show Madame la Comtesse to her carriage," said the maître de poste to a porter standing by. "Bonne nuit, Madame la Comtesse." But Valencia hurried away. She did not wish them to know that she had come on foot.

As she passed into the street, she ran against someone who was coming in. His exclamation and hers were equally joyful.

It was the Marquis. If his ejaculation was one of joy, it was equally one of the deepest surprise. "You here! my little cousin, and at this hour? What has happened?"

The rain was falling fast now, and he opened the umbrella, which he had just closed, and held it over her head. "I suppose the carriage is somewhere near by," he said. "What is it? Is anyone ill—dead?" The last solemn word was said with anything but a tone of sadness; one might say that it possessed a note of hope. So long as Valencia herself was not dead, it mattered not to de Vallée who should cease to breathe at Salvaresse.

"I—I—am on foot," hesitated Valencia.

"On foot, and in this storm? Child! What has hap-

pened? Have you run away? Ah! I thought it would come to this."

"I have not run away," said Valencia. "Principally because"—with a rueful little laugh—"I have nowhere to run to."

"Valencie, Valencie, have I not always told you that——"

"Hush, Veelie! I will not hear no more. I should like to tell you something, but not if you will talk to me so."

"We cannot talk here in the rain," said the Marquis. "Come over to the hotel. I can hear what you have to say, and then I will get a fiacre and take you home."

The rain was now pouring in torrents. Valencia's shoes were wet through. Her shoulders were damp from the rain that fell upon her, because the Marquis held the umbrella—as is the habit of his sex—comfortably over himself. They walked along hurriedly, Valencia holding his arm—he drawing her close to his side. "I will take you to Madame Barthe's parlor, child, where you may warm yourself and dry your shoes. Then, when you are rested, I will take you back to Salvaresse."

CHAPTER XVI

THEY were in the Square now, under the shadow of the cathedral. The great space was bare and wind-swept. The little round stones with which it was paved glistened in the rain. Spouts of water poured from the gargoyles which stretched hideous open mouths and nostrils down from tiled roofs. There was no one abroad but a drenched facteur, or some poor working woman, to whom the charity of the rich had not given permission to leave her task before the appointed hour. There were lights, however, all round the Square, and they spoke of warmth and comfort within, and none more loudly than those in the Hôtel Trois Princes, whither the Marquis led the girl. She bent her steps toward the public well-lighted entrance, but he drew her aside; they entered the private door of the little hostelry, and the Marquis ushered Valencia up the steep stairs. They met no one until they reached the landing, and there a good-looking housemaid glanced at them, perhaps jealously, and shrugged her shoulders. "I wonder where he picked her up," she said. "She looks better than the last."

Fortunately neither the Marquis nor his charge heard the words. Valencia followed close upon his heels, and, when he had unlocked a door, he ushered her into a bright, warm room, where a fire was burning.

"I had just finished my dinner," said the Marquis,

"and bethought me of a letter that I would intrust to no one; so, though it had begun to rain, I ran over to the post to deposit it myself. I was in great luck. Here, little cousin, draw near the fire." He took up the bellows, blew the coals, threw on some wood, and soon Valencia's wet shoes were steaming on the fender.

"And have you had your dinner?" asked the Marquis.

"No," said Valencia, who was beginning to feel the need of food. "And I—I—think I am hungry."

"I will order it," said the Marquis. "Here! sit behind the screen; no one need see you." He rang the bell.

"Why should they not see me? Do I look so badly, Veelie?" She laughed, and removed the pins from her hat. She took off her collar and looked at it ruefully, shaking the drops of rain into the fire. "It looks drowned. Poor mimi!" said she, pitifully.

"Hist!" said the Marquis. "The garçon is coming."

"And why should I——"

"Hush!" repeated the Marquis. There was a knock at the door. When he had opened it a crack in width, he gave some hurried orders in a low tone.

"But the Marquis has dined," said the stolid country waiter.

"Did I ask you to tell me whether I had dined, vous! Sacré bleu! And if I choose to dine at every hour in the night, what is that to you, vous! Go and bring what I tell you, and do not forget the Imperial Tokay. Bring it as soon as possible! Go—don't stand there staring, vous! Etes-vous gris?" The waiter disappeared, the door was closed, and the Marquis returned to the fireplace.

Valencia was sitting, luxuriating in the delicious warmth. Her clothes were steaming, she was warm; her hat was on the table. Her hair was loose. The Marquis stood looking at her. He sighed.

"What is the matter, cousin? Are you hungry? For me, I am famished."

"That idiot has his orders to bring it—the dinner—at once. Come, now"—he sat down close to her and stretched out his hand.

She did not lay hers within it. "That is not necessary, Veelie. I can talk very well without holding hands. I never hold Aristodème's hand when I talk with him."

"I have never in all my experience seen a woman who held her husband's hand," said de Vallée, smiling. "The hand was made for the lover."

"Now, Veelie," said Valencia, sitting straight, and twisting up her hair; "that must stop, or I shall go home at once."

The Marquis laughed and glanced at the window, where the rain was pouring down in sheets. "Go! To Salvaresse?" he repeated, "and at once. You would be drowned, my little rat. Very well, then—a truce to compliments. Tell me, petite, what is the cause of this wild flight so late in the day? What have they been doing to you up there?"

"Veelie," said Valencia, "I will tell you anything if you are sensible, but I must ask you some questions first. What can be done to a person who opens a letter addressed to one?"

"To you, do you mean? Someone has opened your letter?"

Valencia nodded.

"I should like to see them try it with me," ejaculated the Marquis. "I fancy it would be the last letter they would open in some time. Does the Count open your letters then?"

"It is worse than that. He may have some right; of that I am not sure," said Valencia. "It is Madame Malafré who has opened my letter. A letter from some of the Quentin, or from Mrs. Quentin herself. I have not even read the letter; I do not know what it contains, but I can readily guess. She said that I was to have a note fixing the date of my coming to them. That was it, I am sure."

"So you are going to them—to Paris?"

Valencia nodded.

"Ah! then, I should never see you; I never see them in Paris!"

"And why not, Veelie? Surely they will allow my cousin to come and see me, a married woman."

"I do not move in their circle," said the Marquis, in a tone which implied that his circle was a much higher one.

"But they know the de Tallant and the San Gênes, and the Archbishop is their most intimate; and I saw you at their house—the Abbey—first, you remember. How was that?"

"Valery took me there. He has careless ways. I fancy they were— Well, well, tell me more of this affaire of the letter. Did she steal it from you?"

"The same as stole it," said Valencia. "She took it from the facteur, and I ran down and found her reading it. When I tried to snatch it from her, she threw it in

the fire. I did see the name, Alixe Quentin. I know that she does not correspond with Madame Malafré. I never see her at the Abbey——"

"No, hardly!" said the Marquis. "They do not approve of black sheep." He smiled sarcastically as if the remark held a personal significance for him.

"But where is Madame Barthe? Is she not coming in? And how kind of her to let us have her little salon!"

"She is very kind," said de Vallée. "They are very good to me here. This is the only salon on this floor. It makes it very convenient for me."

"And why are you here again, Veelie, so soon?"

The Marquis came close to the girl and rested his hands on her shoulders. She drew away annoyed, her face flushing, but he held her fast.

"I could not stay away," he said; "I could not stay away."

"I see plainly that I must go to Salvaresse," said Valencia, jerking from his hold and rising. "You do not keep your promise." The Marquis withdrew. "Will you sit down?" he said. "I have a proposition to make to you."

Valencia seated herself. De Vallée took a stool at the farther corner of the fireplace. "I am going to make a statement," said he. "I shall make it as coldly and logically as is possible—for me. Please be good enough to listen. When I have finished, you can answer me if you will. It is needless to say how I shall regard that answer. It will be my life, or it will be my death."

"You are so extravagant, Veelie. For me, I am starved; will the dinner never arrive? Just a piece of bread—anything. I have had nothing since early break-

fast. I forgot to take any at noon, and I was so angry after I found that she had opened my letter that I ran out of the house not knowing that I was hungry."

The Marquis again arose and rang the bell. "I have no doubt that they are making the greatest haste possible. You know, in these little hotels they count very closely. I will see if there is nothing cold for you, petite."

The waiter came, and was told to hasten the preparation of the meal. "Bien, Monsieur le Marquis," he said, and the door was closed.

De Vallée stood regarding the girl, on whose lovely face the flame of the fire shone fitfully.

"I am so sorry to give you so much trouble, Veelie, but I am absolutely trembling with hunger. I was never hungry before. O mon Dieu! when I read again of the starving poor, or the shipwrecked, I shall know what they suffer."

"I wish you could know what I suffer, Valencie."

"What you suffer? Are you ill, then? Ah, bah! Non! non! 'tis that foolishness again. Sit down there, then, and tell me your new trouble."

The Marquis reseated himself. "It is no new trouble," he said. "It is as old as that first day when I met you at the Abbaye de Bref." Valencia gave a sigh of hopelessness, and glanced toward the door as if meditating flight.

"Since I first saw you, Valencie, my dearest, I have thought of nothing and no one else. At that time I was married. My wife was living. She was—as you perhaps have known—at a Maison de Santé, but she was alive. She had made a will leaving all her money to me, and

at that time she was not capable of making another. That made all her relatives angry, but there was nothing to be done. So long as I behaved myself not worse than others, the money would be mine after her death."

"If you loved her, how could you let her go to a Maison de Santé? Why did you not keep her in your home, and care for her? If the money was hers, it could have taken care of you two together, as well as of you two apart. How could you let them take her from you?"

The Marquis did not hasten to explain that he had been the chief instrument in the plan of incarceration in the asylum, but said:

"It was thought best. You know such people are not safe. They often take a dislike to one, a husband or a wife, and kill him. She was put away fifteen years ago. I have had no wife for fifteen years."

When he had remarked this once to Valery, that person had made haste to reply, "Or none to speak of."

"But I have heard that she was only melancholy. O Veelie, can it be possible that she was melancholy because of something you had done? If I had anyone to love me like that, I should be so happy. I should give up all my life to that person, me! I should——"

"I love you like that," said the Marquis.

Valencia arose. "I see that I am to go hungry tonight," she said. "I cannot wait for my dinner here."

"Valencie, sit down; I will not offend again. Sit down, I beg."

Valencia pushed her chair farther from the Marquis, and reseated herself. "You must let me finish my statement," he added.

"Make it very short then," said Valencia, "for the time passes, and I must get back to Salvaresse."

"They will not miss you," said he.

"No," returned Valencia, sadly. "No one will miss me except old Radegonde, when she comes to bring me a little wood for my morning fire, but I must go, all the same."

The Marquis began now to speak very fast.

"I loved you when I first saw you," said he. "Think how much more I loved you after staying in the house with you. Those people up there do not respect you. They do not respect your feelings. They treat you like a child. She and he both deceive you every day. You are slighted and ignored. He is old; he will soon die. I am young, or young enough, and my life with you would make me eternally young. Come away with me, my dearest. I am rich, rich; I can give you everything in the world. Come to me, my darling little one. We will take the midnight train for Paris, for the Mediterranean, for the far East, India."

"I was in India with my father," said Valencia, in a far-away voice, as if in a dream.

"For Capri, Bordighera—wherever you wish. Sweet one——"

"And at Bordighera with my dear father, and with Beel——"

"You shall be adored, worshipped, petted, treated like a queen—like a being above everything human—and I swear to you, when that imbecile dies, I will marry——"

Valencia arose—her eyes were staring, her breath coming fast, her face white. She took her hat from the table. "It is time for me to go," she said. "I thought that I had had enough of sorrow. I am not very happy at Salvaresse, but I see that there can be more of unhap-

piness away from there." She threw the damp fur round her throat, and put on her toque with shaking hands. She walked swiftly to the door.

De Vallée stood there, his eyes devouring her in this new phase of her beauty. "By God!" he said, "I never knew how lovely you were! It is worth having said that —to see you like this." He started toward her. Valencia tried the knob of the door.

"So you locked it when the garçon left," she said. "There is a bell, I suppose." She ran to the bell-rope.

"Do not, do not, Valencie; you will ruin me."

"And—" She did not retort with his own sentence. She stood hesitating with her hand on the bell-rope, her head turned so that she gazed at him over her shoulder. Until now her innocence had kept her from knowing what his actual intention might be, and that innocence was so real that she hardly knew what she feared; but now she saw for the first time something in his eyes which made her afraid.

He sprang to the bell-rope, snatched it from her hand, and threw it high up over the top of a picture-frame.

Her lip curled. She looked scornfully at him. "And you think those manners bring love? I can scream, I suppose."

"No one would hear you; the windows are closed, the storm is raging! Besides, my dearest, the disgrace of it all."

"The disgrace? Is it, then, wrong to be here?"

"Not for some persons, as the world sees it."

"But wrong for me? Not wrong for some people; then why wrong for me? Who are those people for whom it is not wrong as the world sees it? You brought me here."

De Vallée was exasperated at the girl's provoking innocence. How could he ever teach her anything? How could he corrupt that white mind? As well try to throw mud at the stars in heaven, or against the snow as it descends from the cloud. His work must be gradual, even after he had possession of her. He sat looking at her, his face full of yearning; for he was, he thought, dying almost for this lovely creature—a being quite new to him, who was steeped in all sorts of chicanery and devilish wile. He stretched forth his arms. There were tears in his eyes.

"Ah! little Valencie. How I love you," he said. His voice was broken and husky. Had all things been even, had she not been tied, de Vallée might have loved her well enough to be faithful at least for a time. He thought that she could hold him always! "I love you," he repeated; "come to me, my little one. Come to me."

"Do not be silly, Veelie. You love me, and you would tempt me to leave Aristodème."

"Tempt?" Ah! then, she was tempted after all!

Valencia sighed sadly. "Yes, Veelie, tempt. You do tempt me. My life is not gay." She laughed nervously, but her laugh was no more the laugh of a child. It was the laugh of a woman. She gathered her hat and gloves from the table. "Open the door," she said.

"You will have to remain here," said de Vallée. "O my God, yes. Remain, and with me. I cannot let you go; I cannot!"

"You never knew my father, did you? Ah, dear God, if he were here!"

"But he is not."

"No, he is not here. I said before, I can scream, me!"

"And make a scandal which will be worse a thousand times than all the rest."

"The people up there are waiting for my return."

"They know nothing of your absence, Valencia. They care less."

"Ah! I fear you are right," she said. She shook her head sadly. "I fear so. But, certainly, I must go. You promised to take me, to send me—home to Salvaresse."

"I will send you—if you promise."

"Promise? and what?"

"Promise to come again to meet me, to go with me—to leave them. Ah! dearest, dearest! that old man cannot last long." De Vallée fell upon one knee before her. She retreated behind the table. She had her eye upon a friend, a friend on whom she might be forced to call.

"You are really crazy, Veelie! Do you comprehend what I am saying? I must leave here, and at once."

De Vallée arose from his kneeling posture and advanced toward her with his arm outstretched. Her fingers closed over a handle which lay upon the table between them; the handle of a short, sharp blade.

"You see what I have got, Veelie. Remember that I should not hesitate to strike you with this. Oh, yes, mon Dieu! strike to kill you, if you so much as touch me."

De Vallée began to laugh sarcastically. "Ah! a Corsican maiden," he sneered. "A very brave and virtuous Corsican maiden you would make." He approached nearer.

Valencia held the shining blade toward him. He did not fear that she would kill him, but a sharp knife in

the hands of an enraged and injudicious girl is not a pleasant thing to run against. Just here, there was a loud knock at the door. Startled by the knock, she dropped the knife, and he, having now no fear of her, approached her closely.

"Run, run into my room," said he, hurriedly. He took her by the shoulders and thrust her hastily through the doorway into a sleeping-chamber, and closed it. Then he turned the key. Ah! now she was indeed a prisoner.

When the Marquis opened the salon door, he opened it to the garçon, who, with hand held high and flat, came bearing the viands for which the hungry girl had longed.

But as he entered there came also to the bedroom door the femme-de-chambre. She turned the lock with her pass-key, and in the semi-darkness a tall girl ran past her into the corridor. A faint light shone through an open doorway, and through this Valencia hurried, and found herself in a back hall, dim and long. This she followed, and soon came to a flight of stairs. "Escalier de service," said she, half aloud. Down these stairs she flew. Here were the kitchen regions, but the fresh damp air blowing upon her hot face led her to a second opening; she avoided a distant light, and found herself in a deserted back-yard, wet and sodden. No one was in sight. A gate swinging on its hinges gave her a way of exit, and once out of this she stood in a little alley. Along it she ran in haste, guided by a lamp upon an iron bracket, high up and well at the end of the wall. The storm had increased. She was wet again in a moment, but of this she did not think. Her one idea was to get away from that horrible room, those intoler-

able insults. Just under the lamp at the end of the alley she came upon a gendarme.

She indicated the street that ran to the right. "Oú mène cette route?" she asked. The man did not hear her at first. The wild wind was whistling round his head, forcing him to clutch wildly at his hat. He bent his head again to listen.

"Where does this road lead?"

"That? Round to the Place de Cathedral—this toward Chatillon." With hardly a word of thanks Valencia sped to the left, and vanished from sight in the blackness of the night.

The rain was beating pitilessly down, so chilled that it was almost snow. She did not notice it. She ran on, consumed with anger against Madame Malafré, against the Marquis, against her entire world. What right had they to let her fight her own battles like this? The roads were now wet and cold; more snow was falling than rain. Her feet were soaked again and her dress as well. She stumbled on in the dark, her weakness recalling to her the fact that she had had nothing to eat since morning. She would not sit at the table with Madame Malafré, and this unhappy day she had forgotten to get anything from Radegonde. How very stormy it was growing! She could hardly see the banks on either hand. She was not quite sure of the road now. Had she taken the right turning? Ah, God! Where could she be? What was this strange buzzing in her ears? How cold it was! She thought with regret of the embers where Madame Malafré had burned her letter. A house with a fire, even a fire that consumed one's own possessions—even should that house contain her arch-enemy

—would be preferable to this. She shook with the cold. She was chilled through, her head was feverishly hot. Her eyes were burning. How she ached all over! Suddenly she stumbled and fell, and lay there in the pitiless storm; then awoke in her delirium, and staggered by instinct toward the only home she knew.

CHAPTER XVII

IT was not unusual for Valencia to seclude herself at dinner-time, and her absence gave no cause for comment. Madame Malafré was aroused to knowledge of her absence only when Radegonde stood at the library door and asked, in the voice of an accuser, "Where is Madame la Comtesse?"

"Is she not in her room?" asked the Count.

"Not in her room, not in her garden, not in the house —God knows if she is in the world." Radegonde looked at Madame Malafré as if she might have disposed of the girl in some unheard-of way, and hidden the body.

Madame Malafré returned the look as if she would say, "Why come to me?—Am I her keeper?" She said, her face brightening, "She has run away, then, probably to that young——"

Radegonde raised her hand. "Had not Madame better keep all those remarks against the Countess for her husband's ears? For me, I am too loyal to listen. The Countesses d'Alêne have not been accustomed to run away. It would take more than she has suffered to drive her out into a night like this."

At this the Count arose. "Valencie gone, you say? Thérèse, what is the meaning of this? Did she say anything to you about her intention?"

"You may go," said Madame Malafré to Radegonde.

"And go?" said Radegonde. "And go? And why?

Aye, go I shall if that poor lamb does not return, and soon. I have only remained that she might not be killed too quickly."

"Silence!" said Madame Malafré. "Count, will you order this creature out of the room, out of the house?"

"No orders are needed," said Radegonde. "I am one that has a mind of her own, as well as a tongue. If she does not return, nothing—not even the pleasure of waiting on Madame—would keep me here." She made Madame Malafré a low courtesy.

"She has gone away. She has gone to Paris," said Madame Malafré. "That is my explanation of the matter, and I hope you will follow her."

"That I shall do in the morning, Madame, but not before I have paid a visit to the commissaire de police at d'Arcy-Renaud."

Madame Malafré grew white with anger. For once she felt perfectly innocent.

"I know nothing of your mistress," she said. "I did not know she had left the house."

"But—but something must be done," said the Count, with a quaver in his voice. He looked appealingly at Madame Malafré.

"Nothing can be done to-night," said she. "Hear how the storm rages without. It is snowing. She has slipped out, and taken that wonderful necklace of hers, that fortune! and has gone to Paris. Depend upon it, we have seen the last of her."

It was quite evident that Madame Malafré spoke the truth when she said there was nothing to be done. The house was locked, and the household retired—the Count not to untroubled rest. He started and cried out in his

dreams. He talked in his sleep. Madame Malafré constituted herself his nurse, and thus heard more than either he or she could have wished. "Let us go away, petite," he whispered. "Let us go away, just thou and I; no one will know. No one will know—just thou and I, Valencie."

"It is plain," said Madame Malafré to herself, "that such may be his plan. My influence is waning, perhaps. They have some secret understanding together. But I have not advanced thus far to fail now. They shall not go even if I have to—" Madame Malafré here made a peculiar sound with her teeth. It was not a pretty sound, and argued no good to those who stood in her way.

The storm raged and blew. The trees swept the corner of the château, lashed their branches together, and threw the rain and sleet in great masses against the windows. Madame Malafré did not sleep very much. Ah! what was that! Did she hear a faint tapping on the outer door? Was there a cry out there in the blackness of the night? She glanced at the watch on the stand. It was two o'clock. Why should she go down? It was probably only her fancy. Who would tap at the window at that hour and in that storm? If—if anyone had had the foolishness to leave a warm and pleasant home late in the day, to do some unkind act to another, that one should not be considered, or thought of; besides it was the wind, it must be the wind. The girl had run away surely. She had gone to Paris. There she would tell them all about the doings at the château, and probably make up enough more. A tapping? Oh, no!

And Madame Malafré, finding that the Count was at last sleeping quietly, released his hand and lay down on the couch near the fire. There she slept late and did not awake until she heard a rustling in the corridor.

She opened the door widely. Some persons were carrying a form along the hall. Ah! she knew that drenched brown skirt, those sodden furs, the bright hair, fallen and trailing. "Well," she said, "is she dead?"

"She is not dead, Madame, please God," answered Radegonde. "We have just sent for the doctor."

"And who told you to send for the doctor in this house?"

"Four of us, Madame; Aimée, Alceste, Félix, and I, myself. Now, what has Madame to say to that? Are we not in a majority?"

Madame Malafré, seeing that she was indeed but a painfully small minority, went to her own room and began to dress herself. She would see this doctor when he came. These servants would tell some story about her. They would lead him to believe that she had been unkind to the girl, that she had driven her out into the storm. She must attend a little to her own reputation. She realized somewhat tardily that lately it had been slightly neglected. When she was dressed she slipped along to Valencia's door. Radegonde was on guard. She put her long nose in the crack and remarked that no one must come in.

"Oh! so you constitute yourself the judge, do you? And since when have I had no rights in this house?"

"Madame never had any rights in this house. The mistress of this house lies dying, I think. Madame will kindly leave her to die in peace."

The listener heard disjointed sentences within the room, snatches of a little old hymn.

"Je la verrai cette mère chérie. Ce doux espoir—Is that you, Madame? Ah! you have taken my all from me, I have nothing! Beel, dear Beel! do you not see that she has my letter? I must have my letter, I am going riding with the Marquis, I must wear my old convent-dress. My pearls! they are hidden in—" Madame Malafré strained her ears. "They are hidden in—the poste restante, the maître de poste told me they would be safe. He has them, they will come by a special letter. Gartha Valery hid them in the hay, that is where I threw my wedding-ring. What good is a wedding-ring when one is not a wife—" And then the low hymn again, "Ce doux espoir fait palpiter—mon cœur. Ah! it is cold. I wonder if this is the rain. It must be snow. I am cold, so—so cold, I that have had no food. Do you not think that five hundred thousand francs should buy me some food? Some food, some drink, Beel, dear Beel! for the love of God, something to make me warm——"

Radegonde closed the door in Madame Malafré's face, and locked it. "Petit chou!" she said, and ran to the bed, her tears dropping on the girl's hair. She raised Valencia in her arms, and gave her a tisane, which Aimée knew so well how to prepare. She piled the blankets, the duvet, upon her, she made up the fire afresh. She was learning all at once how she loved the little creature who had crept into all hearts save one.

There was a knocking at the door. Radegonde went close. "No one can come in," she said. "She may be dying, my little mistress."

"Not the doctor?" came the whispered words.

"Ah! the doctor! yes!" Radegonde flung wide the door with joyous look and Madame Malafré stepped swiftly across the threshold.

"I wish to know where she has been, where she came from, where you found her, why she——"

"God knows where she came from, Madame!" replied Radegonde, finding herself caught. "We found her on the side veranda when we opened the blinds this morning. It was Félix. He came and roused me. There is nothing more to tell. From what she says, I should think she has lain out in the storm. The skirt is ruined with the mud. Her feet are not warm yet." Radegonde put her coarse hand under the cover, and felt the shaking limbs. "She does not get warm. I think she will die. If the doctor does not come, she will certainly die. Her brain is on fire. I gave her of the cognac, only a little; I wished to warm her. It has warmed only her head." There was a step on the stairs. "Ah! Monsieur le Docteur, pray the good God!"

It was the doctor from Chatillon. Innumerable were the questions that he asked—how it happened that the Countess had been out all the previous night; where she had been belated; why she was walking so far alone and on such an evening—to all of which questions Radegonde only shook her head and whispered through streaming tears, "God knows!"

"Where is the Count, her husband?"

"I will call him," said Radegonde.

He came. Madame Malafré missed the conversation that followed, by being a moment too late to hear the request for the Count's presence. She had gone to her

own room at the doctor's entrance, to make herself the more presentable. When she arrived again at the door of the sick-chamber, she found it bolted; Radegonde stood guard like a French Cerberus, and no rappings, no matter how loud or how determined, were noticed by her. At last the doctor stepped to the door. "Be quiet!" he said, in stern tones, and the disturber rapped no more.

"Count," said the doctor to the trembling old man, "your wife is very ill. I hear that she became belated on the road between here and d'Arcy-Renaud. That she was found only at six o'clock this morning, when the man opened the persiennes."

The Count began to weep. "My dear sir," he said, "my dear sir, I wish that you could get us away from this place. We are both ill, the petite and I. I long to go; we have friends in Paris. It is cold and lonely here. Get us away. Get us away, I beg."

He glanced apprehensively toward the door. One could hear the rustle of Madame Malafré's silk-lined gown. "She is now bending her ear to the key-hole," whispered Radegonde.

"You cannot leave the château at present, Count," said the doctor, who was an old practitioner. "It would be inhuman to leave the Countess alone now."

"I do not wish to leave my wife, doctor. I wish to take her with me, but no one else—no one else."

He dropped on his knees by the side of the bed and sought Valencia's hot hand. He laid his wet face on it, and pressed it to his lips.

Valencia began to murmur excitedly. The doctor raised him. "You must not do that, Count; I positively forbid it. She is very ill. She must have no excitement." He dropped a few pellets upon her tongue.

"God knows she has had enough," said Radegonde, between smothered sobs.

"What sort of excitement?" The doctor turned quickly to the rough old woman.

But Radegonde, the family servant, was not willing to mortify and humiliate her master. "Oh, of all kinds —as Monsieur le Docteur can see. Was it not excitement enough to lie out in the storm all the long night, and stumble along the wet roads and up the hill? How the child stood it, I do not see." The doctor shook his head pityingly. "Then, to have reached the château when all were in bed, and no one to hear. The wind was so loud, Monsieur le Docteur. Once I thought I heard a shriek, a call, but then I said to myself, 'It is but the wind.'"

"Where was she found?"

"Just under the window of Monsieur le Comte," said Radegonde. "Poor little soul! Probably she fell down there, too weak to rise; calling, calling, calling on the Count, her husband, and he too sound asleep to hear."

At these words the Count's tears welled afresh, and ran down his cheeks.

The doctor was dropping some medicine at the little table near the bed. "Can you get ice?" he asked, abruptly.

"We can, I suppose, Monsieur le Docteur, at d'Arcy-Renaud. Till then, I can use the snow that has fallen."

"Go then; tell one of the men to scrape all the snow possible into a pile, a ball, put it in some dark place where it will not melt. You must keep her head cool. I will come again before night. If necessary, I will stay the night. Who will take care of the Countess?"

"That will be my work, Monsieur le Docteur. I shall be here day and night."

"Is there another room close by that you can have?"

Radegonde opened the door into the room that had been the Countess Edmond's. "I can sleep here, Monsieur le Docteur. There is a lounge." She came back after gently closing the door. She walked softly; they spoke in whispers.

Radegonde arranged Valencia's pillows, gave her of the draught prescribed, listened again to the doctor's instructions; and, when he had left, went out, locking the door after her. She passed by Madame Malafré as if she did not see her.

"How is she now?" asked Madame Malafré of the doctor. She spoke as if she were in great distress.

"With care she may recover." He stopped, and looked at Madame Malafré. "Can you tell me, Madame, how that young thing came to be out in a storm like that? When her absence was discovered, why was not the country searched for her? Were you all asleep—dead?"

Madame Malafré flushed unbecomingly. "Her husband thought—we all thought—that she had gone to Paris."

"Is she accustomed to going to Paris in that way—on a moment's notice, or no notice at all?"

Madame Malafré did not answer.

"What relation is Madame to Madame la Comtesse?"

"None," said Madame Malafré, loftily.

"And does Madame live here?"

"I am spending a few days with them. I shall be going home shortly."

"I shall leave the patient with the old woman—Radegonde, she calls herself," said the doctor, looking frigidly at Madame Malafré. "I expect that all my instructions will be carried out to the letter, otherwise I will not vouch for the life of the Countess." Ah! so the instructions had to be carried out to the letter, or she could not live.

The doctor went away. Radegonde took charge of the sick-room. Madame Malafré resumed her sway over the Count. The doctor came again at six o'clock. Valencia's symptoms looked so much worse to him that he decided to remain for the night. He dined with the Count and Madame Malafré. There was a room made ready for him, and he was at the girl's bed-side on Radegonde's report of the slightest change.

This state of things continued for a week or more. The doctor was unremitting in his attentions, Radegonde devoted; and at last, thanks to the two, Valencia opened sane eyes one morning on a remembered world.

"Have I been asleep, Radegonde?" she asked, in a weak voice. Radegonde gave a faint little scream, and went quickly toward the bed. "Ah! my little one," she said, "so you are ali—awake again."

"And who has been so kind to me, Radegonde? Who has lifted me so gently? Have I a friend?" Seeing a faint reproach in Radegonde's eyes—"any friend besides you?" She spoke in a faint voice, almost in whispers.

"You have the good Monsieur le Docteur Pallonteaux, chérie, from Chatillon, là-bas. He has brought you back from death, my dearest. You are here, once more, to bless us."

"To bless who?" asked Valencia, sadly.

"All of us, sweet one—all of us, my little Madame."

Valencia could not conceal her surprise at the tone of Radegonde. She had been kind and friendly enough in the old days, but her tones of affectionate interest were now almost like a caress. Valencia looked uneasily toward the door.

"You need not fear, my dear little one. She cannot get in. I carry the key. Oh, we understand ourselves, Monsieur le Docteur Pallonteaux and I. I have told him how that she makes you nervous, and he says that it shall not be. See! I am going to get the milk for you. Here is the key. I take it so, and lock the door on the outside." Radegonde inserted the key in the outer side of the lock. "Good-by, then, until I come again."

Valencia lay there, weary but happy. She was alive; she was with friends. Were not the doctor and Radegonde friends? The past week was like a dreadful dream. She waited patiently until Radegonde turned the key in the lock.

"And you would laugh," said she, when she had entered and locked the door on the inside, "to see la Vieille playing dairy-maid. She skims the milk, now, taking the cream for herself and the Count. It was all that I could do to get the fresh milk that the doctor ordered for Madame in her little blue pitcher here. Madame is to take that four times a day, besides other things which he has ordered. The little Madame is to eat the cereals at first—well cooked. They are very good for such as she."

"I am glad they are good for something," said Valencia, with a happy smile, and the thought "if they are not good for gentlemen's legs."

"Shall I be rice-fed also?" she whispered to herself, still smiling.

Then she dozed, and Radegonde sat quiet until she awoke again.

"She does not get her strength as fast as I could wish," said the doctor. "Do you give her exactly what I order? She does not eat; something is wrong."

"Oh, yes, Monsieur le Docteur, everything, just as Monsieur le Docteur orders. The milk, the tisane, the underdone biftek—she makes a moue at that, my little Countess—the porridge, and the medicine between times at the regular hours, but she has no appetite; she eats like a bird, Monsieur le Docteur."

"I do not like her symptoms. Who takes charge of the milk?"

"Aimée, that good-for-naught, and me; we have always done so."

"Are the cows fresh?"

"And if the cows are fresh? They are the only things that are fresh in these old barracks. That is one thing that the Count will have. Enough of the fresh milk to eat with his cereals, Monsieur le Comte."

"And no one can get at the dairy, you say?"

"I never said that no one could get at the dairy, Monsieur le Docteur. The lady who does us the honor to lodge here, the Madame Malafré, she comes to the dairy at all times. She skims the milk; she takes what she wishes—she——"

"See that she comes no more," said the doctor. "Can you lock the dairy?"

"If I can lock the dairy! I should think that I could

lock the dairy, Monsieur le Docteur, but that is a cat—that one là-bas"—Radegonde cast her eyes downward as if she could look through the floor—"who laughs at locks. She is a cat who, to compass her ends, will crawl through a window."

"Are the windows large enough? Can I see them?"

Radegonde took the doctor downstairs and through the kitchen into the spotless room with the tiled floor. As they entered, Madame Malafré was coming out. She held in her hand a small jug.

"She has been skimming the cream off the top," whispered Radegonde. "The little lady upstairs gets but very thin milk at best."

The doctor examined the windows. He saw that not even a child could crawl through them, though they were enough in number to keep the air fresh. He looked at the milk and tasted it. He smacked his lips testingly. "That has a strange taste," said he. "Here! Give me some in a small bottle. I wish to take it home."

"Let me give Monsieur le Docteur a large bottle of milk," suggested Aimée, with kind persistence, caused doubtless by some words of praise for the immaculate appearance of the dairy.

"No; I wish but little. There! that will do. Now pour all that milk away, clean the pans thoroughly, and allow no one to enter this room but one of you. If Madame—if others—wish milk, they must get it through the proper channels."

The doctor desired to carry the milk to his home, where his analysis should prove to him that it was not what it should be, but again he had not reckoned with his host. He left the bottle upon the table in the hall

when he again went up to take a look at his patient. Had he been possessed of eyes that could look through stone walls, he would have seen Madame Malafré descend at about this time to the stable, and pour the milk down the chute where Félix each day shovelled the litter.

"Let us see now who is the cleverer," said that lady, "he or I." But there was no one to witness her action —only Cleopatra and Francis the First; and they, knowing nothing of the importance of the matter, did not report it to their crony, Félix.

CHAPTER XVIII

LORD BARRINGTON was dead. "Le Roi est mort, vive le Roi!" had been said in misery and with tears, and no one had shed more bitter ones over his grave than the new lord, sometime known as the Honorable William Hamptdon. Lord Barrington —"Barry," Bill had always called him—had been laid away in the family vault in November, and the Honorable William Hamptdon was in the enviable position of the newly crowned monarch. He had come to his own. He was not glad of this. Sorry enough. Barrington had always been more kind than elder brothers usually are, and Hamptdon had no wish to be called "my lord"—certainly not by old Duncanson, whose eyes were red with weeping. "And such a powerful good sailor as my lord was, too. I beg your pardon, my lord; who would have thought that my lord—your pardon, my lord—who would have thought my lord, of all others, would have gone down in sight of land, my lord?"

This, however, was the sad fact, and the Honorable William Hamptdon had been busy for a month administering the estate of his brother. Then he gave himself a rest, and ran over to Paris to see his sister, the Honorable Mrs. Valliant.

"You won't mind if I don't call you Barrington, just at once, will you, Billy?" said she. "Barry was so dear to all of us, I don't feel as if I could just yet."

"Do you think I like it?" said the new lord, choking. "I'd rather be called Bill than anything. God knows, I didn't want Barry to die. I'd rather sit right down this minute and break stones than take his place."

"Did you ever hear from my friend, the little Countess?" asked Bill, after a moment of quiet. He had walked to the window of his sister's apartment, and was looking out at the crowds and drumming on the window-pane.

"No," said Mrs. Valliant, "I have never heard a word. I sometimes think you must have exaggerated it, Billy. I don't believe she wanted to come here at all."

"Perhaps not," said Lord Barrington, still drumming.

"Egerton heard from Mr. Régence, our banker here, the other day, that there had been several deaths in the family." A hand of steel came up and clutched the heart of Lord Barrington.

"Did—did—he say who—who they were that—that died, I mean?"

"He said something about the Countess. I wonder if that could have been your friend." The fingers wrenched and twisted the beating organ round. "He said she was run over in the Champs Elysées. I wonder if your little friend could have come to town after all."

Finally Barrington spoke.

"Where does Monsieur Régence live?" he stammered.

"I don't know, Billy. Egerton can tell you when he comes in."

CHAPTER XIX

THE doctor was now so much encouraged about Valencia that he came but twice a day, once in the early morning, and again late in the afternoon. "Soon," he smilingly informed her, "I shall come but once a day, and soon after that, not at all."

"I hope that will not happen, me!" replied Valencia. "It is so pleasant to have another friend." Valencia thought sadly of the time when she should be well again, the doctor dismissed, and Madame Malafré still an inmate of the château.

There came a day when the doctor had paid his visit at five in the afternoon. He would not return until the following morning. His patient was on the way to recovery, and he felt very happy.

The house was now quiet. Valencia had heard the stir of serving dinner below in the salle-à-manger for an hour or so; later she had heard the Count and Madame Malafré come up the stairs. Then there was the usual sound of shutting the doors and windows, the noise of bolts and bars being pushed home, and then Radegonde came into the room which had been the Countess Edmond's. "I do not know what is the matter with me, little Madame," she said, yawning. She stretched her arms, and stumbled sleepily. "I am so tired that I can hardly undress. I never felt like this before."

"You are weary taking care of me, Radegonde. You

have had a hard time with me. Kind soul! Go now to your bed; I will ring if I need you." Radegonde sleepily arranged her mistress for the night, gave her the medicine prescribed, and without more ado threw herself upon the lounge in the room of the Countess Edmond. She was soon breathing heavily.

Valencia lay thinking of many things. Suddenly she remembered that she had not heard Radegonde lock the door, but her days and nights had been peaceful of late, and she felt secure and safe. She closed her eyes and slept also. She awoke with a start. There was a movement in the next room. Yes, it was the opening of a door. She thought that it might be Radegonde, as she had retired so early; but no, Radegonde's deep breathing made it evident that someone else was the disturber of the peace of the sick-room. Valencia, all wonder and excitement, her nerves strung to their highest tension, lay, hardly breathing. She remembered what the Marquis had said about thieves getting in to steal her necklace. Alas! there was no necklace now, but there were other things of value in the house.

She almost closed her eyes, but peered out from under the lids. She now saw that someone was entering her room. Consumed with dread, she feigned sleep, aware all at once that Madame Malafré was again the intruder. The girl lay trembling. What did she intend doing? Had she come to harm her? Valencia felt so weak that she felt unequal to cope with this new trouble, but she need not have feared personal violence. Madame Malafré did not approach the bed nearer than to glance at it and see, as she surmised, that the girl she hated was sleeping quietly. Then she stepped to the night-stand,

where stood the medicines—the tisanes, the gruel, which was to be warmed when Radegonde awoke—and, uncorking without noise a small vial, she swiftly poured its contents into the glass that stood there. "To be taken next," was written on the paper which lay across the top of the goblet. "To be taken next?" Ah! when would that be? In a few moments?—in an hour? Well, it mattered not. The result would be obtained before the doctor could arrive, and that was all that was necessary. No power on earth could save her then. She turned with one swift look of hate at the figure lying so still in the bed, and left the room, going out as she had come in—through Radegonde's sleeping-chamber—and closed the door.

Valencia lay and thought this over. She could not awaken her faithful nurse. She would not tell her if she did. She listened to Radegonde's heavy breaths, and, listening, fell asleep again. When she awoke, the sun was shining. Radegonde was standing by her bed with a glass in her hand. "To be taken next," she said, smiling down on her patient.

There was a timid knock at the door. "Let me in for a moment," said the Count's voice. Radegonde set the glass down on the table, and went to the door.

"In—ah—hem—in the absence of Madame Malafré, petite—she having gone, my kind friend, to look after much-needed reforms at her own house this morning—I come to see thee for a little."

Valencia stretched out her hand. It was very thin and white. "Dear Aristodème," she said. She felt that, had he been left to himself, he would always have been kind.

"And now the tisane, little Madame," said Radegonde.

She took up the glass and approached the bed. A look of horror came into the eyes of Valencia. She raised herself with a supreme effort. She stretched out her hands and pushed the offered goblet away with force, hoping to throw it upon the floor. The Count, who had heard of her wanderings, tried to soothe her. Then he turned to Radegonde. "She is out of her head again," he said. "What a strange relapse, and so very sudden! You noticed it?"

"She was quite right but a moment ago," said Radegonde.

The Count, joyful to be rid of the presence of his enslaver for the moment, again approached Valencia. "See, petite," he said, "the doctor has ordered this for thee. It is to make thee well; we all wish thee to be well." Valencia looked sternly at the Count.

"Do you know what is in that glass?" she asked.

The Count smiled. "I do not exactly know, my child, but I am certain that it will make thee well again. We all of us wish to have thee well again."

"All?" said Valencia, with probing look. "All?" Then she fell back upon her pillows, her teeth tightly clenched, tired with the struggle, and closed her eyes. The Count remained by the bed-side, the glass in his hand.

"Do you wish me to take this, Aristodème?" she said, faintly. A tear pushed itself out from under her eyelid.

"Wish thee to take it? Yes, petite; yes." And then he whispered: "The doctor says that we shall go away when thou art well. He will help us. I have talked with him. He has given thee this that thou may'st suffer no more."

"And if I take it, I shall suffer no more—is not that so, Aristodème?"

"Yes, chérie, thy pain will cease."

Valencia turned on her side, her face toward him. "There is no one that cares," she said. "I have not one single friend. Give it to me!"

"Thou seemest to fear the tisane, chérie; see, see!" The Count raised the glass to his lips, and tossed off half its contents. "There is nothing to be afraid of; it will relieve all pain"—and, even as he spoke, he dropped to the floor, the glass falling into the fireplace with a loud crash.

At the sound of the fall, Valencia raised herself in bed. Her thoughts came quickly. She saw a list of complications which could be avoided, did she act on the moment.

"Pick up the glass, Radegonde," she whispered, loudly. "The glass, the glass!"

Radegonde had sprung to the side of the Count, but her hand was arrested in its attempt to raise him from the spot where he had fallen, by the agonized tone of her mistress.

"The glass, Radegonde; the glass! Throw it out of the window. Quick! Run! Run, or I will do it myself, if——"

The girl's foot was thrust out from under the bedcover. The next moment she would stand upon the cold floor. It would be death to her, so the doctor had said. With amazement in her face, that the glass must be disposed of before the Count was raised from the floor, Radegonde ran to her young mistress. She seized upon the slender foot.

"Back! Chérie, back! Into the bed. I will pick up the glass. After all, what matter—" She glanced at the prostrate form—"after all, he is gone; the old Count is gone."

"Quick! then, quick! I hear them coming, else——"

"For the sake of the bon Dieu, back into bed! See! I am obeying Madame." The old woman had run again to the place where the glass had fallen, and was gathering up the pieces, holding her apron as a receptacle. When she had hurriedly scraped up each tiny splinter, she ran into the end room, opened the window, and let the shining bits fall down, down, among the bushes and the undergrowth which fringed the edge of the precipice.

"He would have wished it so, poor Aristodème! I understand now," whispered Valencia to herself. "We must have no scandal about the woman he loved."

Radegonde returned as swiftly as she had departed, and bent over the prostrate figure.

Madame Malafré had come down from the Maison Malafré; she met the doctor on the veranda steps, and they entered the house together.

"And how is our little patient this morning?" asked the doctor, looking at her narrowly.

"I have not seen her. In fact, as you know, I have not been allowed within the chamber at all. That dragon, Radegonde, keeps me out as if I were a murderess."

"A murderess! And why a murderess? Why does Madame use such strong language? It does not suit this peaceful place." Had the doctor studied the habits of

criminals, he would have known that they are the oftenest exposed by their desire to talk of their crimes. Possibly, with the knowledge that he had obtained, this may have occurred to him in the presence of Madame Malafré.

He waited for her to precede him up the stairs.

"I said that, Monsieur le Docteur, only because it sounds like the most abhorred thing on earth. Here am I, only too anxious to do all that I can for the young wife of my friend, and—hark! what is that? I hear voices. The Count in the sick-room? How does this happen?"

She turned pale, and hastened her steps. The doctor, following hurriedly, heard a shriek from Radegonde, a heavy fall, and the crash of glass. Madame Malafré clasped her hand over her heart, and tremblingly leaned against the wall. She slipped to the floor, but the doctor raised her, and she followed him with shaking knees. He entered Valencia's room. There was no use to ask, "What is this?" He went to his trembling patient with but a glance at Radegonde, who was raising the Count's head upon her knee. Valencia lay in her bed, her hands clasped over her eyes as if to shut out some dreadful sight. She was shaking as if in the clutches of a chill.

The doctor leaned over her. "Brandy! Hot water!" he ordered, turning to Radegonde, and then rang the bell himself. The other servants came running. His orders were obeyed, the patient ministered to; and then, with the help of Alceste, he raised the Count from the floor. The old head fell forward helplessly. The rice-fed legs refused to hold him erect any longer. Life was extinct.

Madame Malafré wrung her hands in a passion of grief.

She wept with deep and heartfelt anguish. The Count had stood to her for so long as the greatest prize on earth that, now he was gone, she felt she had lost her one treasure. She had not seen the broken glass. She was quite innocent of knowledge as to the cause of his death. "Ah! he always had a weak heart," she said, weeping bitterly, "and his troubles have been too much for him." Her tears poured down her withered cheeks in floods. She had lost her all.

When the dead man had been taken to his sleeping-chamber, the doctor returned at once to the bed-side of Valencia. Here was another case of syncope. The pulsation of the heart seemed almost suspended, the respiration diminished. The girl was drawing long and labored breaths.

The doctor looked fearfully at Radegonde. "It was too much for her," he said. "How did it happen?" But Radegonde's lips were sealed. "I did not see the Count fall," she said. "That will be for Monsieur le Docteur to decide. The Madame there says it was his heart."

Radegonde will never forget that terrible morning—the going from the room of Valencia to that of the Count; from the sick-room, which might have been the chamber of death, to the room of death which, by a simple mistake, was no longer the room of the living.

Madame Malafré, prostrated by this new and sudden shock, knelt by the side of the bed. She held the small old hand in hers. They tried to remove her from the room. "I was the only thing on earth he loved," she said. "He was all I had. Leave me alone. Do not come between us now." Her reign was over. To her this was the end of all things.

CHAPTER XX

AND it was on this very day of all days that Lord Barrington, with his sister, the Honorable Mrs. Valliant, arrived at d'Arcy-Renaud. There seemed little sign of activity as they approached the château. The windows and blinds were closed, the shades down.

"I wonder if they are away," said Barrington, with a strange sinking at the heart.

"Where can they have gone?" said Mrs. Valliant. "You say they do not travel."

The physician met them at the door. They were taken into the library, and there was explained to them the death of the Count, which had taken place within the hour.

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Valliant. "When can she be moved, doctor?"

The man of medicine shook his head. "I can hardly tell," he said. "I have thought all along that the child was dying, merely from lack of interest in life, but this latest shock! I hardly know! It will be some time, I am afraid, if at all." The Honorable Mrs. Valliant took off her bonnet.

"What are you going to do, Katherine?" said Lord Barrington.

"I am going to stay here," said his sister, "until I can take her away with me."

"Do you know our little Countess?" said the doctor, smiling at her decided manner.

The lady shook her head. "No," she said, "I have never seen her, but pray God I shall see little else until she is well. When may I go to her?"

"She cannot bear any excitement now," said the doctor, "but I am glad that you are here, Madame. I hope that you will stay. I have never known any young creature, I think, who was so utterly friendless."

Lord Barrington walked to the window and stood looking out.

"The child shall not want for friends," said Mrs. Valliant. She dropped her face in her hands, and burst into a violent fit of weeping. "To think of it," she said; "to think of it! Could anything be more pitiful! A child left to the mercy of such brutes as these!"

"The Count was not a brute, Madame; your brother will tell you so. He was a weak old man, completely under the thumb of an adventuress, who had no scruples so long as she gained her ends. She was discreet and clever. It was going on almost under my eyes, and I did not see it. The little Countess was too proud to complain. It was only after the Count died in her room, I think, that she awoke to the fact that she might herself have been the victim. Remember, Madame, this is only my surmise. I have not been able to obtain from her any confirmation of my suspicions. She mourns bitterly, and I think it is over the fact that she distrusted her husband when he urged her to take the tisane. She had seen the woman steal into her room at night and throw the contents of a vial into the goblet. I learned this from her wild talk in her uneasy sleep, but she will not

help me to prove it; and when the Count came the next morning and tried to persuade her to drink from that glass, she, for a moment, thought that he knew what he was doing, and that he was the tool of someone else. I think at that moment, imagining herself deserted by all her friends and certain that she had nothing to live for, she felt that if her husband would be happier without her, he should have his desire. Radegonde tells me that she had just said, 'I will take it if you wish me to,' when he, thinking that her reason was not secure and hoping to coax her by his example, tossed off enough to kill a drove of oxen and then fell to the floor, killed by the woman who really loved him, and who hoped to live some years with him after sending his young wife to her grave."

"She will be punished, of course," said Mrs. Valliant, "this Madame Malàfré." The doctor cast his eyes downward.

"We have no proof. The glass has disappeared, the little Countess will not testify. I think that she would even tell a falsehood to let the woman go free, for she held that this would have been her husband's wish. The child was ill for a long time first." And then the doctor told the story of the girl's walk to d'Arcy-Renaud, her trying night of exposure and illness. "At that time, when she was unconscious, she called for many people. Oftenest for someone named Beel, Beel! Is that an English name, Madame?"

"Probably some friend of hers. I wish to God he had been here!" said the gruff voice of Lord Barrington, from the embrasure of the window.

The Honorable Mrs. Valliant now took up her quarters

at the château. Lord Barrington remained there also. There was no one to say them nay. Madame Malafré had slunk away to the house on the hill after the final departure of her life-long friend. "The little Countess," as the people called the tall girl who was lying so ill upstairs, was owner of all, which was not much; but it was hers, and there was no one to dispute the right of the new-comers to remain.

Valencia was lying one day with her hand in the hard hand of Radegonde. "Radegonde," she said, "who is in the château? Is Madame Malafré here?"

"No," said Radegonde. "The doctor has shipped her for good."

"Then are you and I the only people here?" She gave a long sigh, as if rest had come at last.

"There is that Aimée, cette miserable!" Valencia smiled; the fight was still on then. "That weakling Alceste, and that bossu Félix. We are surrounded with incapables, Madame and I, but we shall still live, I hope."

"But—but, Radegonde, I have heard other voices. There are other people in the house. Did I not hear the voice of ze 'onorab' Veeliam 'Amp'done this morning?" Valencia laughed. Ah! how it took her back, the name so spoken, to the days of last summer. "Am I right? Is he here?"

Radegonde, seeing nothing strange in the pronunciation, nodded her head solemnly.

"Would Madame la Comtesse like to see ze 'onorab' Veeliam 'Amp'done?" she asked.

"Is he really here, Radegonde? How does he come to be here?"

"He accompanied his sister, petite, pardon—Madame la Comtesse."

"His sister? Is she here, too?"

"She is here to remain. She has encamped herself. Oh! those Anglish; I cannot bear their ways. We had to send to the town for tubs, as if we had not enough trouble without that. Ze 'onorab' Veeliam 'Amp'done wallows like a great porpoise in the horse-trough every morning. He breaks the ice, if Madame la Comtesse will believe!"

"I can readily believe," said Valencia, much interested. "I know some English, me!"

"They are all crazy," said Radegonde. "Félix was spelling the news in *Le Petit Journal*, last evening, when the doctor was with Madame la Comtesse, and it said there—I heard him read it out—that the Anglish were all crazy. It called them 'sale Anglais.'"

"They need not call him that," said Valencia, with a little of the old spirit in her voice, "or his—his sister either. They who send to the village for tubs."

"He is milor now," said Radegonde.

"Quelle bêtise! A milor, Beel! Then I cannot see him. I should be afraid of an English milor, Radegonde. Does this lady, the 'onorab' Mrs. Valliant, ask to see me?"

"And what else, petite? Nothing else is talked of. Have they not waited a week to see you?"

"I have no clothes, Radegonde. Ah! if I had only a pretty sacque or gown. I never had a gown—I never expected to be ill, me!"

"There is a sacque of the Countess Edmond," suggested Radegonde, tentatively. "I could get that."

"Dear Phigie! She always said, 'The child may have anything of mine.' Ah, me! and I thought she was not kind! Get it, Radegonde; she would like to have me wear it."

When Mrs. Valliant was ushered into Valencia's chamber, she found a long, thin girl lying under the cover, almost lost in a mantle which would have wrapped her twice around.

The older woman took the girl in her arms. "You are with friends now, child," she said. "You must come away with me. We will travel; I will take you to Paris. You shall live with me, or with Mrs. Quentin—with anyone whom you like."

Valencia pushed her away a little and looked into her eyes. "I love you," she said, putting her arms round the neck of her new friend. "Oh, why did I not know you before, me! But I cannot travel, Madame. I am seventeen and a half; I am a widow; I am a Countess, and I have not one single sou. I hear there is some trouble about the will."

"You need not let that annoy you, child. We have enough for all."

"But I cannot live on you, you and—and Beel. If he was Beel still, yes, but I am afraid of Milor Barringtone." She gave the name an extreme French pronunciation, and then fell back on her pillows laughing a little.

"She is better already," cried Mrs. Valliant to the doctor when he came in.

"Ah! so the experiment worked. You are doing her good. At this rate she may go to Paris within the week."

Valencia shook her head. "I cannot go, Monsieur le Docteur. I shall have to remain here, me! I am very sorry; I should love to go, but I must remain. This is my home."

"Then we will remain with you," said Mrs. Valliant.

However, before very long, Valencia was persuaded to think of going to Paris. She was up now, and moving about. She had seen the great Milor Barringtone, and had found him just the same old Beel. She had told him about the loss of the jewels, which had disturbed him, and at the same time made him feel more easy concerning her. She had sent for the village dressmaker, and had had two dresses fashioned from two black ones of the Countess Edmond's; and, with a little cap which she had made for herself, she looked a very childish widow indeed.

On every occasion the argument as to her going away was renewed. "You were to visit Mrs. Quentin," said Mrs. Valliant. "I am visiting you. I have been here three weeks now, so has Barrington. Why won't you visit me?"

"I never thought of that," said Valencia. "That makes it easier. But there is the railroad fare; I could not let you pay for that—me!"

"There is something left of the last pearl, Valencia," said Barrington. He thrust within her hand a respectable sum of money.

Valencia took it doubtfully. She was beginning to wonder if all those lovely clothes had not cost more than the amount which she had given Hamptdon to expend for her.

And so it came that Valencia went away. Could it be

that she looked back longingly at the château, at old Radegonde, at Félix, Aimée, and Alceste, as the carriage turned the corner, and the cliffs of the hour-glass shut them away from her sight? She had never known how she loved the place until now. "And my garden, my garden—shall I ever see it again?" she cried. She had not been allowed to go there, to say farewell, which had been a grief to her.

Six months in Paris, six months more of travel and kindness and devotion from the two families whom she knew and loved, and the time had come, Barrington thought, to speak. Mrs. Valliant had been intrusted with this mission, and she approached her subject as a hunter does a frightened fawn.

But approach it she did, and at the very first word she met with a cold douche.

"And why must I marry, me? Is there nothing in this world but marrying? Must it be always of love and lovers that we talk? I have had to marry to exist. I could not do as other young girls. I longed to dance, to play, to be gay, to be petted, to be the young daughter of a house, and I had to marry and be a wife. And, now that I am free, I shall not never marry, me!"

Mrs. Valliant put her arms about Valencia's shoulders.

"You need not marry now, dear," she said. "Bill will wait."

"But he need not wait, Beel. I love to be free. I wish to be free. I am young—I should be free. I could have wished now that Aristodème, that is my husband, had lived. We were just coming to know each other when he died, and, besides, I am poor. Fancy to your-

self; I have not nothing. I must go back soon, and stay in my home. There is enough for me and those old people up there. I want to be free. I have my garden. I should like to see my garden."

"She can go back to Salvaresse," said Barrington, "but I swear she sha'n't go alone. Will you come, Katherine? You must, for I intend to go, anyway."

"It is cold yet at Salvaresse, Valencia," said Mrs. Valliant. "You must wait, in any event, until the spring is fairly here."

"I will wait," said Valencia, "if I must, me! But I long to be there, at my home. I never thought I should so much love that home of mine."

Valencia thought sometimes of de Vallée. She wondered why she never saw him anywhere, and was thankful that she did not, in the streets or at the house of Mrs. Valliant. She shuddered when she thought of him. Comparison of his unholy passion for her, with the steady, calm devotion of Barrington—for what woman is not aware of a fact as fixed as that—disgusted and mortified her. She was older now, had heard and seen more of the world. When she knelt at night, as she used as a little child, and repeated her infant prayer, which she had never neglected, "O dear God, bless my father and mother, and all my friends," she added always now—"and I pray Thee, never let me see him again." The "him," it is needless to say, stood for de Vallée. The hateful experience in the rooms at the Trois Princes was pictured over again and again in her mind. Sometimes she fancied that she saw the Marquis in the distance. At such times she would, if walking,

tell the maid to call a fiacre, and, springing in, hasten home.

Much of Valencia's time was spent with the Countess Edmond, who, though not strong, was fast returning to health. On the day when finally Valencia had been informed that she might go to see her, the girl felt almost afraid. So much had come and gone since they had met! She wondered if Phigie was at all disfigured, if her sweet face was as calm and placid as ever. She rang the bell at the door of the hotel of Monsieur Régence with much trepidation. "If it were only over!" she murmured to herself; "if it were only over!" She was ushered up the broad white flight of stairs with its crimson carpet, by various liveried servants, and on the second flight found a white-capped femme-de-chambre, whom she followed down a long, wide hall. Arrived at the very end, the maid knocked—

"Entrez," was heard in the gentle drawl of the Countess Edmond. The door was quietly opened by the maid, and Valencia found herself within the room.

The apartment was so spacious that for a moment she did not discover Iphigénie; but, yes, there she was, over there by the window, frère aîné sitting by her side. Iphigénie lay upon a couch; over her knees was a lovely robe of Roman colors, on her head a pretty blue cap, and round her shoulders a gay shawl. She looked a very charming invalid indeed.

When the Countess Edmond saw who her visitor was, she allowed her knitting to fall to the floor, thus disengaging one hand, which she held out to Valencia.

Valencia's heart gave a great throb. "She really

cares," was her thought, for had she not proof in the neglected knitting lying on the carpet by the side of the lounge?

She advanced rapidly toward the Countess and clasped the free hand with both of hers. Iphigénie could not return the double pressure, for the fingers of her right hand held a box of chocolates; between her teeth was a fine large round ball of the same dark confection, into which she had just pushed her pretty white teeth, so that the creamy pink was oozing through.

"Ah, it is the little Valonthia! Thou art come at last, Valonthia. At last!"

So Phigie had really cared, after all. She had said "at last." How blind we are in this world! Valencia threw herself upon her knees by the side of the couch, kissing the pretty dark hand. She laid her cheek against Iphigénie's knees, and whispered "Phigie, Phigie." She shook with emotion.

"The poor little thing is fatigued, my heart. Bring her a stool."

"I love to be here," said Valencia, with shining eyes. "I could kneel here always. It is like prayer to me. O Phigie, Phigie! So thou hast loved me all the time!"

"And why not, child? Was I ever unkind to thee?"

"Oh, no, no! never!" exclaimed Valencia, remembering only the dear first calm of her life at Salvaresse.

When Count Edmond had brought a little stool that Valencia might still sit close by the side of his wife, he picked the knitting up from the floor. It was a marvel to Valencia. The needles were new ones, of the purest ivory, not like those which Valencia remembered. The wool was a lovely combination of white and rose, a double

thread, and Phigie was slowly weaving out a new pattern sent to her from a wonderful shop in Paris. When she had forced the finest chocolate that Monsieur Meunier had ever made, between the lips of Valencia, Iphigénie filled her own rosy mouth and took up her knitting.

"I am content with Paris, Valonthia," she drawled slowly, "but Edmond—speak, my heart."

Then Count Edmond spoke, and said, with longing in his voice, that life would never be the same to him until he was back again at his beloved Salvaresse. "I never knew how I loved it," said he. "I would be back there again, sitting on the veranda in the sunshine, with Phigie by my side with her knitting."

"Knitting, knitting, knitting," added Valencia. "Mon Dieu, but I love that knitting, me! Once I was impatient with thy knitting, Phigie, but now I think the sound of thy needles more dear than any sound in the world."

"C'est ça," added frère aîné, nodding decidedly, and clinching the statement of Valencia with the emphasis of his words, but a tear forced itself out from under his eyelid. "Ce pauvre Aristodème! He is deprived of hearing the click of her needles forevermore. Pauvre Aristodème!"

Valencia turned pale.

The Countess Edmond languidly raised her eyes from the white cheek of Valencia to catch her husband's glance. "Quiet! heart of my heart," said she, giving his knee a push with the toe of her slipper, "Quiet."

"But I have never heard a word about my brother's death," continued Count Edmond, with calm persistence. "Thou knowest I could not attend his funeral, Phigie,

for thou, dearer than all the world, were ill—ill, O mon Dieu! ill unto death."

"We had a message, frère aîné, that our Phigie was dead. There was no signature."

"Aristodème, my brother, told me of that. I was beside myself. Thou wert unconscious, my love. Thou madest no answer when I spoke to thee; I was beside myself. I could not bear it. I felt that I should die. I ran into the hall. I seized upon a servant. 'The Countess is dead,' I cried. 'Telegraph at once for my brother, Count d'Alêne, at Salvaresse near d'Arcy-Renaud,' and then when I heard that Phigie had spoken and had asked for me, I quite forgot all in my joy until my brother arrived."

The Countess Edmond lay the chocolate which she had just taken, back into the box again. "Yes," she whispered, "I was sick unto death." She let the box fall and stretched out her free hand toward her husband. "Thou hast a kind soul, Edmond. The child does not wish to talk of Aristodème, thou seest."

"But I long to know. Was it his heart, petite? Tell me, was it his heart?"

Valencia raised a blanched face from Phigie's knees. "They said it was his heart," she answered. "She—she—said it was his heart."

"She should know," said Count Edmond, shaking his head sadly; "she should know, no one better."

CHAPTER XXI

"I CANNOT say that I like the new maid very well."

It was Mrs. Valliant who had spoken. She and Valencia were sitting over their second breakfast. Lord Barrington had just left the room to join his brother-in-law for a ride in the Bois.

"I have not noticed her particularly," said Valencia, absent-mindedly, "and yet, now you speak of her, she does not attract me either. She seems connected in my mind with something unpleasant."

"How could that be? You never have seen her before."

"I wondered myself how that could be, me! and yet her face makes me feel afraid in some way."

"I will dismiss her at once," said Mrs. Valliant, "or rather, as soon as I can find another."

"I beg that you will not," said Valencia. "It is only a fancy, probably. She does her work well, does she not?"

"Very well. She is willing and pleasant, and takes upon herself anything that the others think is not their business."

"Then I should keep her by all means. What is her name?"

"Henriette. Does that tell you anything?"

Valencia shook her head. "Not nothing," she said. "We never change at the château, you know, and I have

never had the chance to see other people's servants. I wonder if it could have been at the convent. However, do not let us talk of her. It must be only a fancy. How soon may I go to Salvaresse, Katherine?"

"As soon as the will is settled. You know there were complications about the property, its passing to your husband and brother together. It will be arranged soon now, I hope. You know that my husband is glad to be your banker to any amount."

When Valencia had been with the Valliants for a year or more, they persuaded her to go about with them somewhat. They had a charming circle of friends, both among the English and the old Parisians, and Valencia joined them sometimes, though not always willingly, at the houses of these friends on very informal occasions.

"You will go with me to the Montlhery this evening, Valencia?" said Mrs. Valliant one morning as they were driving in the Bois.

"No, no! Paris is not made for me. I long for my home; I cannot bear to see people. I am fond of the Montlhery, but I cannot now go into the world, me! Here am I just about to receive that which comes to me from poor Aristodème. Shall I begin to forget him, and plunge into the gayeties of the world?"

"It is hardly plunging into gayeties of the world to take a quiet dinner with the old Marquis and his daughter."

"I said that I could not go yesterday. They will not expect me."

"If it were not that Egerton and Barrington had gone to the country about the new horses I should not insist.

They will not arrive until some time in the early morning. I dislike to leave you, and I hate to go alone."

"You knew all this when you accepted, Katherine. Besides, I have a headache to-day, I feel unaccountably drowsy. I have felt so all the morning. It is something new. No, I will remain at home and wait up for you, if I can keep my eyes open."

Valencia had eaten her lonely dinner, and had dropped asleep over a late novel, when Henriette, the new maid, came rushing into her room. Valencia awoke with a start. "Does Madame la Comtesse know what has happened?" cried Henriette.

"How should I know what has happened, Henriette?" Valencia arose from her chair, very pale. "Who is it? To whom has it happened? Tell me at once."

"Madame Valliant! Madame Valliant!" stammered the woman. She put her hand to her heart and sank upon the sofa.

"Oh, oh! tell me, tell me at once. Where is she? I must go to her."

"Yes, Madame la Comtesse must go to her, she must lose no time. She is in a syncope at the Marquis de Montlhery's. They have sent the carriage for Madame la Comtesse."

Valencia had been overcome by a strange sleep, but these words aroused her, she stumbled to the door, physically weak, her mind nervous and alert. "Bring my cloak," she said, "and my hat, anything, a lace for my head will do; hasten! hasten!"

The woman produced at once a long warm cloak trimmed with fur, and a bonnet which Valencia was accustomed to wear for driving. She helped the Coun-

tess induct herself into them, brought her gloves, and led her to the door. "Will Madame la Comtesse have a glass of eau sucrée before she goes?"

Valencia mechanically put out her hand and took the glass, which, strange to say, was standing ready. The action was a blind one and she struck the goblet, spilling a portion of the contents. She drank what remained with feverish thirst, and then went hurriedly down the steps and got into the carriage. The footman, who was standing by the door, closed it with a bang, not waiting for the words, "To the Marquis de Montlhery." As the carriage rolled away from the curb, "At last!" said a voice, and Valencia felt an arm about her figure, which drew her close. She was dazed, bewildered.

She endeavored to draw away from de Vallée, for she recognized his voice at once.

"O Veelie, is it you? Were you there at the Montlhery? Did you come for me? Are you taking me to the Montlhery? Is Katherine very ill?"

"Katherine, whoever she is, may be dead for all I care, dearest. I have you, that is all that I wish."

"You have me! Is this then a trick? Is Katherine not ill then? Is it all a ruse? Let me out on the instant." She pushed herself away from him as far as possible. "I shall scream," she said; "scream my very loudest, and create such a scandal. Oh, yes, Veelie, such a scandal. I shall apply—to—the—police. Where are you taking me?"

"We are going to travel, my sweet one, you and I, alone, away from everyone in the world. See, we are approaching the gare. See the lights. You are my wife, remember, until we can be married."

"I will not go. I will not marry with you. I will apply to—the chef—de—gare—the chef—de gare—" These were her last words. She fell back in her corner of the carriage, unconscious. This was better than de Vallée had hoped when finding her so resistant at his first words. He jerked his watch from his pocket, and, putting his head out of the window, "Drive like the devil," he said, "or we shall miss our train." Then he suddenly changed his mind. "This place is too public," he muttered—and then called to the coachman, "Drive to Ville d'Avray."

The coachman whipped his horses, for Ville d'Avray is a long way from the environs. They drove an hour or more and finally drew up at the little country station. A train composed of wagons-lits was drawing out of the gare as de Vallée alighted.

The coachman and footman at his orders carried the unconscious girl into the waiting-room and laid her on a bench. De Vallée left the footman to watch her, while he went to discover at what time another Paris train would arrive. He found by telephoning that another train had already left Paris and would stop for passengers at Ville d'Avray.

"Can I get accommodation for my wife on that train?" he asked. "I am the Marquis de Vallée," hoping thus to impress the country chef de gare.

The station-master replied that he might find a compartment which was not full for Monsieur le Marquis, but as the arriving train was an excursion train, leaving that evening for a fête in the south of France, he feared that the carriages would be full and that there could be no change made at so late an hour.

De Vallée paced up and down the floor of the waiting-room, he glanced occasionally in the direction of the bench where Valencia lay. He gnawed his mustache nervously; he would never be easy until they were in the train and speeding away toward his estate. Once she moved and he was at her side in a moment. "What is it, dearest?" he said.

At the sound of his voice, Valencia screamed and sat up. When she recognized him, "How dare you?" she said. "Take me back to my home at once."

There were whispers among the people sitting about waiting for their trains. The old woman who was wiping the floor in a far corner, whispered to a lady. The lady murmured, "Poor soul!" and said, in a low voice to her husband: "It is a marquise who has become insane. They are taking her where she can be placed under restraint." She ceased whispering and turned toward the girl, from whose lips the wild words were pouring forth. Valencia's cheeks were blazing, her eyes wild, her bonnet was on one side, and her hair tumbling down. Given, to the thoughts of those present, only the suggestion and suspicion which the Marquis had engendered in the minds of the station people, and she looked a very insane young woman indeed.

"I will be heard," said Valencia, in a loud tone of voice. "Mesdames, messieurs, this man is not my husband; I am the Countess d'Alêne. He has stolen me away from my home, from my friends; I know not where he will take me, but——"

De Vallée spread his hand over her mouth.

"Stop," he whispered fiercely. "Do you want the whole thing in the papers to-morrow? Figaro would rejoice in such a—scandal."

"If I wish it in the papers to-morrow? Yes, and yes, and yes again. A woman cannot be stolen from her home in this outrageous way. O gentlemen, ladies, do help me." She struggled to rise, but de Vallée held her down on the seat. His movements to the onlookers seemed very tender, and indeed he was not rough. Just now he fancied that he loved Valencia with an all-absorbing passion, and while he was physically gentle with her, no strategy which would secure her to him was too daring for him to attempt. When she was compromised sufficiently, he felt sure that she would accede to his desires and marry him. If she would not, so much the worse for her.

Valencia dragged herself away from him and ran stumbling across the room. She fell at the feet of a gentleman, old and gray-haired, who with his daughter was waiting to take the night train. She laid her hands upon his knees and looked appealingly up into his face.

"As God is above me, dear sir," she said, "this man is not my husband. I pray you, help me. Let them keep me here until some of my friends may be notified, I beg of you, I beg of you—" She had seized the old gentleman's coat. De Vallée, who had followed her quickly, was trying to disengage her fingers. The young woman, fearful of the effect that the excitement might have upon her father, who was old and feeble, said, in frightened tones, "Oh! take her away, monsieur, do take her away! She will kill my father. She may have some dangerous weapon concealed about her. Take her away, sir, we beg of you."

De Vallée, with the help of the hireling who was in his pay, disengaged Valencia's hands, and lifted her from

the floor. Shriek after shriek rang through the building, and her captor, now much alarmed for fear that his ruse would be circumvented, was relieved to hear the station-men calling out that the train was ready. Once out of the neighborhood of Paris and he would have more control of her and there would be less suspicion of himself. But of that there seemed at present to be none. "Poor gentleman," "Poor gentleman!" he heard on every side. Some persons said "Poor lady!" and looked pityingly at the girl as she was carried to the train, but no one ventured to inferfere in what they were sure were a husband's rights, and all breathed more easily when the door of the carriage which was carrying Valencia to her fate was closed.

The Marquis was fortunate enough to find a compartment which was unoccupied, and into this they lifted the helpless girl.

"His wife! The wife of the Marquis? Madame la Marquise?" muttered the chef de gare. "I used to see her in days gone by. I thought that she was dead. Certainly I have heard so. But the lady to whom he was married was a large, stout person. She must have lost her flesh and have grown astonishingly thin since she used to travel on this line."

The footman held a pillow ready for the head of the lady, and produced a well-packed bag ready with all the most necessary belongings from Valencia's own room at Mrs. Valliant's hotel. Marvellously perfect was every arrangement which concerned the capture of the victim!

They made Valencia as comfortable as circumstances would permit, and then de Vallée stood in the doorway, filling it up completely. He put a most liberal douceur

into the hand of the chef de gare, and each watched, and the Marquis prayed his especial saint, that no unwelcome traveller should come to take a place in the compartment which he had, thanks to his gods, found empty. The bell had rung, the final call had been made by the station-master, and, certain at last of the success of his ruse, with a sigh of relief the Marquis had seated himself opposite Valencia. But that Fate which watches over the innocent helpless decreed that a belated traveller should rush into the station at the very last moment, look hastily into several carriages in search of a seat, and, just as the train was moving out of the station, regardless of the warning of the chef de gare, spring upon the platform of de Vallée's carriage, and putting his hand inside, open the door.

"But I have engaged this compartment for myself," exclaimed the Marquis, crimson with rage. "Do you know who I am?"

"That makes little difference, monsieur. I cannot walk. All the other carriages are full, and the train has started, as you see."

The traveller was a man of about sixty years of age, one evidently not of the superior class, but of some position, from the manner in which he asserted himself. There was nothing for it but to allow him to have his way.

"How far does the gentleman go?" asked the Marquis.

"I travel three hours, until I reach my home," said the stranger.

The Marquis resigned himself to the inevitable, wishing that he had chosen for his attempt any night but one

when all the world were going to the fête, to travel on this crowded line.

He put his bag on the rack, drew a silk cap on his head and sank back in the corner of the carriage.

The stranger did likewise, and soon the compartment resounded with the snores of the two.

At about two o'clock a stop was made at a small junction. Valencia turned and groaned uneasily. Her face was hidden by a veil. The stranger looked inquiringly at her and then at the Marquis. The Marquis awoke and sleepily arose. He glanced out of the door. "I should like to get a glass of absinthe," he said to the stranger. "Would you mind, monsieur, keeping the door and allowing no one to enter?"

"With pleasure, monsieur," returned the stranger.

"If my wife awakes tell her that I shall soon return. That I have gone to procure her some supper. She may be frightened to find herself alone with a stranger. To be frank, monsieur, my wife is insane, and I am taking her to a retreat. She may utter wild words when I am gone. Pay no attention, I shall soon return."

"Mon Dieu, monsieur, mon Dieu! What I can do, I will. You have my profound commiseration, monsieur, my profound commiseration." The stranger glanced uneasily at the prostrate figure. It was not a pleasant thing to be left alone, at midnight, in a compartment with a woman whom her husband had just declared to be insane.

No sooner had the door closed on the Marquis than Valencia sat up. "Oh, sir," she said hurriedly, and in a whisper, "help me to escape from that man."

"Chère madame," returned the traveller, sympatheti-

cally. "Chère madame, your husband will return in a moment. He assured me that he would not be long away."

"I have no husband, sir. I live with friends in Paris. I have been seized upon, kidnapped by that man. My friends will be crazy, wild, to know where I am. Oh, sir, tell me which way lies Paris."

"Will not madame lie down?" said the stranger, in a soothing voice. "We are going away from Paris now. Monsieur will return almost immediately. He has gone to seek some food for madame, I think. Lie down, madame, do lie down again." Valencia's face had been covered by her veil all the time that she had been speaking, but she was now hastily unpinning it. She dragged it from her face. The moment she saw the stranger clearly, she cried: "Oh, I know you now, sir. I know you now. You are the maître de poste at d'Arcy-Renaud. Tell me, sir, do you not recognize me? Look, look! Monsieur, dear monsieur, look, and save me."

A flash of recognition came over the man's face. "Is it—am I right by chance, is it the little Countess from Salvaresse?"

"Ah," she cried, joyously, "you do know me. I am not married to that man, monsieur. I have been carried off, kidnapped. Will you lend me a few francs that I may return to Paris? Oh, quick, monsieur, hasten, he may return."

"So it is the little Countess," exclaimed the maître de poste, in bewilderment, "and what is this I hear? that the Countess has been carried away——"

"Oh, yes! yes! Do hasten, do hasten! Give me, I beg of you, enough to get back to my friends. Ah, I

know now who that Henriette is. She was the femme-de-chambre at the Hôtel Trois Princes." She shuddered and put her hands over her face.

Just then a train came thundering into the station. It passed them, rumbled along slowly, and more slowly, and stood still.

"I am sure that you speak the truth, Madame la Comtesse. I am sure you do; why, the old Count has not been dead so long that—" The maître de poste interrupted himself—"That is the train for Paris." He opened the door of the compartment on the opposite side from the station, thrust some gold into the hand of Valencia, saying, "I quite believe Madame la Comtesse. I hope I am doing right."

Valencia slipped out of the carriage, and ran along between the trains. She opened the first door that she came to. Anything to get away from her vile captor. The compartment into which she plunged headlong was occupied by two sleepy men. One of these awoke, and Valencia, crying, "Beel! Beel! save me!" fell into the arms of Lord Barrington.

"Valencia! What does this mean?"

By this time Valliant had awakened, and was asking questions as eager as those that Barrington poured forth, neither waiting for answer.

"It is my wife," he said. "Something has happened to my wife, and you have come to tell us."

"They told me last evening that something had happened to her," gasped Valencia, "but I see now it was all a ruse. She is well, well! It is I who have been the victim."

"What do you mean?" again asked Barrington, turning pale.

Just then the handle of the door was turned. It opened to reveal the chef de gare with the Marquis de Vallée.

"No room here," said Barrington, carelessly. "No room here; we have engaged this carriage for ourselves."

"The gentleman is looking for his wife," explained the chef de gare. "The lady is insane. She has run away from him. He thinks she may have come in here. She slipped out of the train while he had gone for supper for both."

Valencia, when she saw de Vallée, threw her arms round the neck of Barrington. "Beel, dear Beel, do not let them take me. Do not, oh, do not."

"They shall not take you," said Barrington. Gritting his teeth, he put the girl behind him, and filled up the window.

"So that is your game, is it?" he said, shaking his hand under de Vallée's nose.

"This is her lover, my wife's," said de Vallée, turning to the chef de gare, with a show of bravado. "She has tried to join him before. For this reason I must place her under restraint."

"I assure you, Monsieur Chef——"

"And who are you, sir? I know the Marquis; I do not know you."

"You can be of use here," said Barrington, turning to Valliant.

Valliant came forward, opening his pocketbook as he came, searching for his card, but suddenly he closed it. "There is the minister of finance," he said, pointing to a gentleman who was hastening toward the train. "I suppose you know the minister of finance, and I see the chief of police is with him."

De Vallée, at these words, became deathly white, and turned as if to slink away, but Barrington was out of the train and upon him in a moment. He held de Vallée in iron grasp while Valliant descended from the carriage and approached the minister of finance. Valliant was well known to him, as well as to the chief of police, and in a moment the two were in the compartment, examining Valencia as to what had happened. Her answers were confused because of the drug which she now was sure had been administered to her, but she could remember having been sent for to come to Mrs. Valliant, and also finding herself in the carriage with the Marquis. The special Providence of this occasion gave some hurried orders with regard to de Vallée, and the train, as it rolled toward Paris, carried with it that gentleman closely guarded in a compartment by himself, and Valencia sweetly sleeping under the eyes of her three protectors, Valliant, the minister of finance, and her old friend, Lord Barrington.

When Mrs. Valliant had left Valencia asleep in her own room, she descended to the library. Here she found her brother walking the floor, and chewing the end of an unlighted cigar.

"She is asleep," she replied, to his look of inquiry. "Poor little thing. Will her troubles never end? She seemed so secure here in our own home, but I have learned a lesson, Bill. She shall never stir out of my sight until she is your wife."

"I'm afraid you'll have to keep a long watch," growled Barrington, gloomily, and added:

"That villain wasn't satisfied with stealing her

pearls. I really thought they would have been enough. What do you mean? Why do you shrug your shoulders, Kate?"

"Did I? Oh! well, I never agreed with you about that, you know, Bill. Many a man who would think nothing of ruining a woman would not steal a penny."

"No, I don't suppose he would; no one in his senses would steal a penny, but when the stakes are so large—Oh! yes, depend upon it, the wretch has the necklace in safe-keeping somewhere. He can dispose of the pearls one by one, just as poor little Valencia did. No one could ever trace them to that especial collar of pearls, or discover their whereabouts."

"You are wrong, Bill," said his sister, "all wrong. This has been my experience in life." Mrs. Valliant was considered somewhat strong-minded by her friends and always expressed herself with great clearness and decision. "Very few gentlemen—I mean men of station and position—steal. The very man who would not hesitate to walk off with your wife, would consider it a crime, and the law upholds him in it—to steal your horse or your dog."

"Oh! if you are talking of horse-thieves, I——"

"Now listen, Bill. How many men of our class do you know who would, to your knowledge, cheat, whom you would suspect rather, of cheating at cards?"

"Why none, of course," said Barrington, sitting down suddenly and looking at his sister in astonishment.

"No. How many men of your acquaintance hold the honor of a woman very sacred? How many men who move in the better classes will hesitate to poach upon their friend's preserves? How many men will hesitate

to betray a pretty, helpless nobody who falls into their clutches—supposing she has no one to protect her?"

Bill sat silent thinking of his sometime friend, Cluggs, then spoke——

"There may be some such," he said, "but they are few, thank God!"

"Well, but think a moment. Isn't dishonesty among men in a money transaction well-nigh unforgivable, even if the law does not step in? Isn't a man ostracized for such crime against his fellow? But where is the man who has been ostracized for a worse crime against a woman? Show him to me, Bill, go and find him. The crime against a woman must be glaring and almost unnamable, which will cast a man without the pale of society. You know it as well as I, but that same man, who would ruin his friend's home, cause growing children to cast their eyes downward with shame when their mother's name is mentioned, who would destroy the innocent treasure intrusted to his charge, that same man will pay his gambling debts almost before they come due. You can trust him with your fortune, while you are alive, and with the honest distribution of it after you are dead."

"Not de Vallée," said Barrington, sticking to his first assertion.

"Oh, yes, Bill, yes. A man who will rob a woman of all that is dear to her will rob her fellow-man of nothing, and do you know why, Bill? It is because you lords of creation think too much of yourselves. You hold the honor of your sex very dear, but the generality of men with whom we have to deal hold the honor of woman very cheap, or the results would not be those that we see daily."

Barrington arose. "It may be so," he said. "You are prone to heroics, Kate, and love your high-horse too well to relinquish the exercise. I am not talking of men, but a villain, who is capable of any vile act. De Vallée would stoop to anything, and I am perfectly convinced that he has Valencia's pearls in his possession to-day. I am going to have my innings in swearing against him shortly, and I am thinking of revealing my convictions in open court."

"You are wrong, Bill," said Mrs. Valliant, spurring on her steed. "There are a few decent men in the world, such as you and Valliant, they are very few and far between, but bad as the file are, they will not add theft to their crimes, because noble man will tolerate no crimes against himself. This is a subject on which I feel very strongly."

"I see you do," said Barrington, as he went out of the door.

Left alone, Mrs. Valliant threw her knee over the pommel, drew her foot from the stirrup, dismounted, and went upstairs to resume vigilant watch of her patient.

Seclusion, bed, and the doctor were the portion of Valencia for the next three days. On the fourth, as Lord Barrington was reading *Le Matin* in the library, hardly seeing that which his eyes glanced at, waiting impatiently for news of Valencia, the door opened and she came in. She was white and weak, but she approached her old friend with decision in her bearing.

"Beel," she said, "will you marry me?"

Barrington turned white and red by turns.

"It is very, very selfish, I know, Beel. I know you would like to marry the little Montlhery, but if you do, Beel, I am sure the Marquis will get me the moment he is free again and, and, say, Beel, tell me: Cannot you answer, will you not marry me, you? If—if—" Valencia looked down, "—you do not mind my cast, Beel——"

"I think I can manage to put up with it," returned Barrington.

It was strange with what impatience Valencia awaited her wedding-day. It was not possible that Lord Barrington should feel very much complimented by her plain, straightforward statement of her feelings.

"You know very well that I never have loved you, Beel. I have never loved anyone, me! Neither you nor anyone else. But you are my friend, Beel, are you not?" She leaned confidingly against him as of old. "You do not now say, 'Back! back! Valencia, it is not customary.'"

Barrington laughed nervously and put his arm about her. "Thank God, I need never say that again, Lonci," he said. "I am willing to be your friend, if I cannot be anything else."

"But you are to be my husband, Beel. Is it not strange to marry with one's friend? I never heard of a husband who was a friend."

"Egerton and Katherine," said Barrington.

"Oh, but they are English," answered Valencia. "That goes without the saying."

CHAPTER XXII

A POET has said,

> "To marriage all the stories flow
> And finish there,"

but the end was not yet for Barrington and Valencia.

Lord and Lady Barrington had been married a month, when after a visit to England at Lord Barrington's small estate, they turned their faces again toward France and Salvaresse.

It was a lovely June day when they took the train for d'Arcy-Renaud, and a bright sunny afternoon when they arrived at the station. Alceste was waiting for them with the ancient carriage set high in air. Cleopatre and François Premier seemed more superannuated than ever, and the old general utility man himself was proof of an unarrested condition of decay and mildew. As they drove out of the town, Valencia recalled that dreadful night when she had fled alone through the rain and had spent the long black hours unsheltered from the wild storm. She shuddered and drew closer to Barrington's side. Ah! here was the hour-glass, and when Alceste, François Premier and Cleopatre kept in the middle of the road, the towers of Salvaresse loomed up in the distance. Now they were in the narrow band between the rocks and now in the second bowl of the hour-glass, and now Valencia caught sight of Radegonde standing on the very

edge of the steep cliff, waving a red duster and screaming wildly, "Bienvenu! Bienvenu!" Aimée was not far behind her, but where was Félix, her old friend Félix?

The sounds of the strokes of an axe were heard, but ceased suddenly when Radegonde had turned long enough to shake the duster beckoningly at someone behind her. Then old Félix hobbled to the edge of the precipice and also welcomed the new-comers with many a humble gesticulation.

"Let us walk up the path," said Valencia. "Stop here, Alceste." She sprang from the antiquated vehicle and ran up the slope, Barrington following. Ah! what a joyous welcome! Radegonde threw her apron over her head and sobbed, and Aimée followed her example. Félix wiped his eyes on his coat-sleeve.

Valencia looked round on them with amazement.

"Ah, had I but known that you loved me so! See! Beel, they weep. They have missed me! They love me; I have had some friends after all, me!"

When Félix had wiped his eyes a proper length of time, he remarked: "But this will never do. I must go back to my work. Marie's Jean from Chatillon is helping me, also his cousin from the mill, là-bas."

"And what are you doing, then, Félix? Making my garden? Ah! my garden. Let us go up there, Beel. Come! Come to my garden."

"I have made and cared for the garden of Madame la Comtesse well," said Félix, "but at the moment we are cutting down the old tree, which was struck by lightning, and threatened to fall upon the house and kill us all. We had a terrific storm. We had not the time to write to Madame la Comtesse."

"Ah! it is the old oak, and where are the pies?"

"They have gone, Madame la Comtesse; at the first stroke of the axe they flew away."

"I hope that you have not scattered them for good, Félix. I should love to see Charlemagne again. Come, Beel, let us go up in the garden and see the old tree fall. Poor old tree! It has sheltered my friends, the birds, for years. Charlemagne, Charlemagne, viens ici, mon bébé."

She hurriedly mounted the steps and opened the garden-gate. The plateau was, as of old, a riotous mass of roses and summer flowers, but better kept than it had been in Valencia's day. She ran along the walk to the square where stood the old bench. Here was still standing the decayed apple-tree. She turned to Lord Barrington. "There is the hole, Beel, where I hid my pearls. Who could have taken them?"

"De Vallée, undoubtedly," said Barrington, with that ready judgment which, in some eyes, makes a man bad in one thing, bad in all.

Valencia gazed at the black hole with a sigh. "And to think that you must take care of me always, Beel," she said mournfully.

He laughed joyously. "Yes," he said, "to think that I may take care of you always."

Just then there came a shout from Marie's Jean, and an ominous creaking sound. The men who were assisting Félix pulled at the ropes that were fastened to the great oak to steady it. They guided its motion so that it should not touch the house. It fell with a crash toward the two, the branches brushing against the terrace within a foot of where Valencia and her husband stood.

Then there was another shout from below, one of amazement and surprise. The men had all run to one spot. Félix was tugging at something in the tree-top.

"Is anyone hurt, Beel?" asked Valencia. "Let us go and ask."

But Barrington, his eyes opened more widely than they had ever been before, pointed speechless to where Félix stood. The old man had drawn something from the ragged nest of the pies, and was holding it out at arm's length. Valencia gazed aghast at the glittering balls of snow as they flashed in the sunlight.

"Beel! How unjust you are! It was Charlemagne after all."

"It was so covered up with sticks and straw that I had difficulty, oh! but the greatest difficulty to draw it from the nest," called Félix, in his old quivering voice.

"I wonder if it is injured," said Valencia.

"Let us go and see," said Barrington. "There are sure to be some discolored ones among them. I rather wish they hadn't found it. Now you will be independent of me, Lonci, little Lonci!"

They were walking with rapid steps toward the gate. There was no one in sight. They were hidden from those beneath the terrace by the high hedge. Valencia threw her arms round Barrington's neck. She drew him toward her. She kissed him on cheek and lips. "I love you, Beel," she said. "Love you! Love you!"

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